

THE FIVE CENT

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The Nemesis; or, Tracked to Their Doom.

[Continued from "Wide Awake Library" No. 194.]



With a last wild cry of horror and anguish, burning, suffocating, he threw himself on the floor.

CHAPTER I.

SARAH CHASE.

FELIX grew no better, in fact grew worse daily; he seemed to suffer no particular pain, but gradually was losing flesh, slowly fading away.

Mrs. Brophy began to be awakened to the stern truth, and a bitter blow it was to her, for Felix was the only child she had ever had; she went earlier to her work, and came home sooner, and to her credit be it said, drank less gin than she had done for years.

Her wages did not amount to much, yet she

always reserved a portion for the purchase of delicacies for her sick boy.

She had been away all day long, and when she came in at five o'clock in the afternoon, it was with a sad face, for she had obtained no work, and had not a single penny; to be sure there was dry bread enough in the house to stay the pangs of hunger, and water enough to allay her thirst; but little Felix, he could not eat the bread, he should have had something daintier.

Since the illness of Felix, Amy had remained close by his side, instead of continuing a fruitless search for work.

When Mrs. Brophy came in that afternoon,

she, for the first time in several days, obtained a view of Felix by the light of day, and the apparent change struck her dumb with anguish for the time.

"Felix—Felix!" she finally brokenly cried "Me poor bye—me poor bye!"

"Nay, mammy," was the answer, "do not take on so. Your boy is going to Heaven, where there is a big river—ever so nice—Jordan, the doctor calls it. And just think; I'll be dressed in white that never gets dirty, and hear singing and music all the while. Won't that be nice, mammy?"

Her only reply was a sob.

His mind taking a leap from celestial to terrestrial affairs, he said:

"Did you bring me anything good, mammy?"

"Nary an orange, Falix, nor a bit of cake, ayther. I airned not a cint the day."

"Never mind, mammy," he said, resignedly. "I am not disappointed at all. I can wait. It won't be long afore I'll be up there where they has oranges, and cakes, and grapes, and lots of good things, and I can have all I wants; and mammy, I'll save some for ye agin the time ye come, too."

This proof of affection on the part of the boy she had so misused, filled her with sorrow and angry self-reproaches.

Felix was happy and contented, and when they gave him for supper a piece of bread soaked in water until it was soft, and with sugar spread on it, he ate it, and pronounced it better than cake.

"Have you anything to do to-morrow, Mrs. Brophy?" asked Amy, after Felix had dropped off to sleep.

"No."

"Then I, too, will go out and try to find something to do, for Felix must have good things to eat, even if we go hungry."

"God bless ye, Amy; ye're a good girl, so ye are, to think of me little Falix."

And Mrs. Brophy's voice was tear-filled.

At eleven o'clock all the inmates of the room were asleep.

The two women were astir by shortly after sunrise, and Felix soon after opened his eyes.

He consented to being left alone for a while, and soon after seven o'clock Mrs. Brophy and Amy started out in search of work, each taking a different direction.

Work is no easy thing to find, especially when sought for by women, and notwithstanding the fact that Amy visited store after store in search of cleaning to do, or any other work, ten o'clock arrived and she was no better off than when she started.

She made one last attempt.

The answer was negative, and she left the shop with sinking head and downcast heart.

That sinking head proved fortunate, for on the walk in front of the store it enabled her to see a little roll of bills.

Like a tigress she pounced on them, gave a searching, sweeping glance around to see if any owner was in sight; none did she see, and with a sigh of supreme satisfaction, she clutched the bills tightly, and hiding her hand in her bosom, flew rapidly along toward home.

When half way there she saw a crowd on the sidewalk ahead of her; she was about to cross the street to avoid passing through it, when she heard a loud cry, evidently proceeding from some female in distress; so she kept to her course and reached the crowd.

The center of attraction was a pale-faced woman of about forty; her dress was of the poorest material and well patched, but scrupulously clean and neat; in an instant Amy understood the situation, for she had seen numbers of such before; the woman was about to be set in the street by a hard-hearted landlord because she had failed to be on time with a few paltry dollars of rent.

There was a certain sadness in the woman's face, that enlisted Amy's sympathy at once, and murmuring: "Poor creature!" she sidled up to her through the crowd and asked: "What is the matter?"

The woman, taking her question as one of idle curiosity or a mockery of her woe, turned sharply on Amy, and was about to give an angry answer; but Amy's gentleness of appearance, her sympathetic face, disarmed the woman, and she replied:

"I owe the landlord three dollars. I promised to pay him within a week, but he will not wait, and thus disgraces me," and her words fairly rung with bitterness of feeling.

Never before had Amy's sympathies been so completely roused; the woman before her was more of a lady than any she had ever seen so treated before, and it made her so indignant that she could then have choked the cruel landlord with a good grace.

She thought of the money clutched in her hand; thought of it, and with generous impulse was about to place it in the woman's hand.

Then she thought of Felix, wan and weak.

No, she must have the money for him.

A struggle between sympathy and love took place at once.

If she had had none but herself to think of, she would not have hesitated a single instant. But Felix—ah! there was the rub.

Then a new thought struck her.

"How much does the roll contain?"

She hesitated a moment.

"Come into the hallway," she then said, and led the way herself.

In its concealment she took out the roll.

It contained five one dollar bills, and then they were as precious to her as gold to is to the miser.

If she gave the woman three dollars, it would leave her two; would Felix live long enough to need more than that?

Her face, working, was closely watched by the unfortunate woman, whose eyes, it must be confessed, eyed the bills greedily.

"Madame," and Amy's voice was choking with battled-back affection, "will you repay me within a week?"

"Yes."

"Sure?"

"Yes."

"I would not ask it," said Amy, "only little Felix is sick, ay, dying, and I may need it. Here is three dollars, take it," and she thrust the amount into the woman's hand.

"God bless you," was the reply. "Come with me," and she glided off and up the stairs, to the single room she occupied, now filled with the landlord and several minions of the law.

"Ah!" said the landlord, with a sneer, "here is Miss Chase again. Well?" and he planted himself before her.

"Here is your money!" she exclaimed, thrusting the amount into his hands.

"Thought you'd raise it somehow," he said, with a coarse laugh, rather than have all your furniture tumbled out of doors. Hey, boys, you needn't take the bedstead down, and bring the table again; and Miss Chase," he said, leering wickedly at her, "now you know the kind of a man I am, so don't hope to run into debt for your rent. Don't ever try it on again."

"No fear of that," she quietly replied.

"That's right!" he said, and turning on his heel left the room.

A few minutes later, the table, which had been carried to the walk, was brought up and restored to its accustomed place.

After the men had gone Miss Chase did a queer thing.

Stepping close to Amy she put a hand to either side of her face, and gazed long and intently into it.

"What is your name?"

"Amy."

"Amy what?"

"No other—except Brophy."

"Amy, God bless you for your kindness to me this morning. Your face has brought back to me some of my early life. I wish to say this to you, in your early life, for it may save you much pain. Amy, never do a wrong thing, for it will follow you to your very grave."

Her tone had in it a solemn ring, yet, withal, was tender and kind.

Amy remained but a few minutes longer, for she knew that Felix would be impatiently waiting her coming, so bidding Miss Chase good-by, and promising to drop in soon and see her, she hurried down stairs and sped homeward, light-hearted and happy, for she had done a good deed. Stopping at a baker's, she purchased some cakes, and at another place some fruit. With these in her hands, she entered the sick room.

At sound of her footsteps in the hall, Felix had struggled into a half sitting position, and as she opened the door he sank back, murmuring contentedly: "Amy is come."

Amy propped him up and gave him some cake, as he was eating which a robin lighted on the window-sill, and sat there, chirping.

"See, Amy!" he cried. "A robin! Poor little fellow; guess he's hungry. Come, robby," and Felix chirped with his lips.

The robin seemed to understand the invitation, and either very tame or driven by hunger, he slowly hopped along, and finally began picking the crumbs from Felix's wan, transparent hand, a sight which affected Amy to tears.

CHAPTER II.

NEMESIS' VICTIM.

ONE was troubled in mind, and no mistake.

The disappearance of two of his men had unsettled him a good deal, and so preoccupied was he that, in attempting to step to the platform, he ran into the wires stretched between the brass chair and the electrical machine, and dragging the latter from its position on the pillar, it fell to the floor, the shock of the fall making it a perfect wreck.

"D—the luck!" he cried, in a savage voice. "Everything seems to go wrong. But," he added,

in a consolatory tone, "it will give me a chance to do some work I am very fond of. The old machine was not very reliable, but, my boy," slapping Two on the shoulder, "I'll show you one now that'll make your hair stand. I'll make it with a shocking helix strong enough to kill an ox at one touch of the key," and the tone with which he finished his speech was one containing much enthusiasm.

A thing to be seen at a glance was that One was a man of good education, while the whole paraphernalia of that horrible den—the outgrowth of his brain, showed him to be a man of great genius.

One was happy when he saw a victim disgorging his money, or disclosing the place where it was, and happy when working on some devilish invention whereby to rack and torture those who fell into his power; beyond these two things nought made him happy.

The light was turned out and they left the room; Nemesis then arose, and tired and weary, was very willing to stretch himself out on his bed and court sweet sleep.

It was late in the morning when he awoke, and cautiously opened the door of his room.

Celeste was already up and in the outer room, and thither Nemesis made his way.

Breakfast was ready and they ate it together, almost in silence, neither speaking except when necessary.

The meal over, Nemesis arose from the table and began pacing softly to and fro, his mind engaged in building schemes to encompass the destruction of the Red Circle.

He extended the stretch of his walk until it stretched from corner to corner, or nearly so, some obstructions in one of them hindering his further advance; approaching this latter, it struck him to make an examination of the obstruction and find out of what it consisted.

When first he stooped down he thought it a pile of rubbish, but an instant later he knew different, and a joyous exclamation escaped him, and grabbing up an article he clutched it tightly to his breast; what had he found?

Simply a coil of copper wire.

"Just the very thing above all others which I wished," he cried. "The very thing to obtain which I was digging that tunnel. Ah, ha! sheet brass, too!" and he hailed the finding of several feet square of sheet brass with great pleasure. "With these things and a file I'll make Rome howl."

Eagerly he pulled the pile of stuff hither and thither, and by great good fortune he stumbled across a three-cornered file.

Just then he heard a grating noise, and Celeste, standing near, cried in tones of alarm:

"Go—go! somebody comes."

Hugging his treasures tightly to his breast, Nemesis glided across the floor and disappeared into Celeste's bedroom; she had just managed to seat herself at the table when a head appeared up the stairway; it was that of One.

"How are you, my dear?" he asked.

"Very well," she replied, concealing her agitation with crazy cunning. "Do you want me?"

"No, I only came up to look over this pile of stuff in the corner; I want some wire."

"Ha—ha—ha!" laughed Nemesis, in inward noiselessness. "Too late! Somebody's been there before you."

One did not search long, but gave up with the remark:

"I'll make the old wires answer."

All night long he had worked on the unfinished parts of an electrical machine, long since projected, and now being completed, he was about to set it up.

Retreating to his own room, Nemesis applied his eye to the hole in the ceiling, and saw One at work below him.

The new machine was too large to stand on the pillar, so it was placed on the platform directly in front of his chair. In height it was over two feet, and was nearly that square, the works being all concealed in the interior of the box. The brass chair was moved nearer the platform, so that the wires would reach the box, passing through holes in which they were secured to the machine by thumb-screws.

When it was in readiness, One set it to working, and Two tested it by placing a hand on the arm of the chair, receiving a shock the instant he did so.

It was a success so far, and as One gazed lovingly at it, he said:

"I hope we'll get a chance to test it soon."

The light was turned out, and they left the room.

Instantly Nemesis was on his feet.

Wrapping himself in a toga, and putting on a mask, he impatiently waited for a few minutes,

then with the file and his coil of wire carefully concealed, he descended the staircase, passed through the many angled main hall, until he stood in torture chamber A.

He had no time to waste, and he knew it; understanding precisely what he had to do, he was able to work swiftly and well.

Opening the casing or boxing around the electrical machine, he unscrewed and took out of the post, in which it had been fastened, the wire that conducted the positive electricity to the chair; he next cut two lengths from his coil of twenty-five feet each; he screwed an end of one of these into the post, and then fastened the end of the other piece to the original wire; he next conducted the long ends through a check in the bottom of the box, and then along under the carpet, which he found was only laid loosely on the floor, to the wall; the paneling was made of batts, with a bead; in the little hollow on either side of the bead, he ran a wire up the wall to the ceiling, and followed the bead there until he shoved the ends up through the knot hole.

But little more remained to be done.

Just beneath the bottom of the box he ran an edge of his file across the wire, so that in case the box were suddenly pulled up, the wire would break, and not afford a clew to his whereabouts.

He stole noiselessly along the halls, opened the door, ascended the stairs, and passed into his own room.

One end of the wire he secured tightly, leaving the other end so that it could be worked; procuring a bottle, he cut the bottom off, by first holding a heated wire around it, and then plunging it into water.

Into the neck of the bottle he put a cork, and through this he passed the wire connected with the battery, the idea being to be able to handle the wire without touching it; he knew very well that when the ends of the wire were apart, no shock could be produced by the battery; but should he bring them together with his bare hands he would receive its whole force; on the contrary, by fastening one end, and holding the other by the medium of one of the best of non-conductors, glass, he could complete the circuit at will, without any risk to himself.

When these arrangements were finished, his face was aglow with satisfaction, and he rubbed his hands with delighted anticipation.

"Henceforth I live for vengeance! Curses on you, bloodhounds, I'll make you tremble and shake with terror!"

Soon after came a low tap at his door, and when he opened it he saw Celeste standing there.

"Supper is ready," she said.

"All right," was his reply, and going outside he sat down and ate his supper with a good relish.

For a while he sat and talked with Celeste, then arose, bade her good-night, and retiring to his room threw himself on the bed, not intending, however, to fall asleep; nevertheless, he did so; when he awoke he felt puzzled for a minute, then remembered lying down, and muttered:

"I must have fallen asleep. How long have I slept? Can I have missed anything?"

Quickly arising he crossed the floor to his spy-hole, and ere he peered through, he saw that the room was lighted; lying down he saw the Inquisitors were prepared for work.

"Great God!" muttered Nemesis. "Has another unfortunate wretch fallen into their clutches?"

Had there?

Let us see.

Two men were sauntering along Broadway at half past ten, and a gas-lamp which they pass shows that both wear the emblem of the Red Circle, a death's head with emerald eyes.

They are Eight and Nine.

As they are about to pass Niblo's Garden, the stream of play-goers came rushing out.

They pause, and in the shade of the doorway scan the faces of those who pass.

At length they see emerge, a stout, well-built, florid-faced man of perhaps forty or fifty years of age, well-dressed, heavy gold watch chain in sight, and blazing in his shirt bosom a magnificent diamond stud, whose worth they quickly estimated among the hundreds; and moreover, he was inebriated and alone.

"There's a 'snap,'" said Eight.

"Looks like it," assented Nine.

"Shall we try it on?"

"Yes."

"Who'll brace him first?"

"You."

"All right, here goes."

They followed the man a few blocks and then Eight stepped up, touched him on the shoulder,

seized his hand and shook it heartily, saying:

"Banks, old boy, glad to see you. When did you get in town, and why in hell didn't you let a fellow know you were here?"

"You're mistaken, sir," was the reply, in a voice slightly thick and husky, "my name's not Banks; it's Wyman."

"What?" in pretended surprise. "You aren't Banks?"

"No."

"And not from St. Louis?"

"No, sir. N'Orleans is my home."

"I've made a mistake. Excuse me, please."

"Certainly, sir, certainly," said Wyman, and muttered to himself, "it's queer to be spoken to in this way."

"Why, Wyman, is this really you?" and as the person spoke he extended his hand.

As the reader will see, this new-comer was none other than Nine, who had been posted by his companion.

Wyman was staggered, for he had considered himself thoroughly unknown in the Metropolis, where he had come, in fact, to have a little tear; compelled to admit that he was Wyman, he grumbled:

"Yes, but who in the devil are you?"

"Smith—Joe Smith; don't you remember me?"

"D—d if I do," was the bluff reply.

But Nine was equal to the occasion.

"Ha—ha—ha!" he laughed, loudly, slapping Wyman on the shoulder. "You sly dog, you always would have your joke! Don't know me? Ha—ha—ha! that's good; come and have a drink."

Wyman was not allowed to decline, but was literally dragged into a near-by saloon; after a drink or two the southerner became somewhat reconciled to the company of unremembered Joe Smith, and together they started off up town—to see the sights.

To see the sights! How many men owe an untimely death because of such a desire! Their number is legion!

Of course the ill-matched pair brought up at the Web; the formula of drinking was gone through with, and Wyman was enticed into the private room; Nine left him alone; a few minutes passed, the back door opened, disclosing a woman's figure and face; her arm was raised, her finger beckoned, her lips said:

"Come!"

With mind inflamed by that demon, rum, prudence was gone; he waited for no second calling, but followed eagerly, stretching out his arms to clutch in close embrace, the fleeing, enticing figure.

No thought of danger crossed his drink-disordered mind as he went down the steps; but then he learned what he had done, for the floor gave way and he was precipitated into a net; when this descended he stepped out and it went flying upward.

Sobered by the terrors of his situation, he became wild with apprehension; he found the door, and pounding on it raised a perfect hell of terrorized cries, but nought was returned then save their echoes and silence.

Twelve o'clock had arrived—the Red Circle met. Eight and Nine reported their work.

"We will away to the torture room," said One. Five and Twelve will bring in the man."

Wyman's visitors divested him of hat, coat and vest, blindfolded his eyes, led him into the room, and ere the quaking, terror-stricken man could realize it, he was confined in the brass chair.

"Take off the bandage!"

It was taken away, and the poor devil was confronted with all the mysterious horrors of masked and cloaked men, and a situation for himself that he could not comprehend.

"What is your name?" asked Two.

No reply was given.

"Now," said Two, sternly, "we want no fooling. You must tell us your name, age, residence, how much you are worth, how much you have in bank, sign a check for the latter amount, and tell us how to get hold of your personal property. Will you do it?"

"Go to the devil!" said the astounded Wyman.

"What do you take me for?"

"A dead man if you don't answer," said Two.

"Give him a shock!"

One bent and touched the key, but Wyman uttered no groan or cry, and showed no sign of pain.

"Give him more."

Down went the key—still no effect.

Down further—Wyman looked puzzled, that was all.

Down nearly to its full extent—quietness still.

"There's something wrong," said One, in chagrined tones. "Five, Twelve, take him out."

They released Wyman.

"Twelve, take hold of the chair."

Then One pressed the key, and asked:

"Do you feel anything?"

"No," and as Twelve spoke, he stepped over the wires and sat down, resting his wrists in the open hasps.

"Do you feel anything yet?" and One gradually forced down the key until it brought up against the plate below.

"No," was the reply, accompanied by a smile.

Ere it could fade away, it was replaced by a look of supreme agony; there arose one fearful, blood-curdling screech; Twelve bounded upward and forward, struck One, knocking him from his chair; then came a heavy thud as Twelve struck the floor—a dead man!

CHAPTER III

WYMAN'S LIFE IS SPARED.

LET us go back a little and see what part Nemesis had borne in the transaction ending in the terrible death of Twelve.

As eight of the Inquisitors gathered in their places, he had exclaimed:

"Great God! Has another unfortunate wretch fallen into their clutches?"

Almost immediately, his eyes answered his self addressed question, for he saw the blindfolded Wyman led into the room and placed in the chair; then he heard the words:

"Take off the bandage!"

Mutely Nemesis watched what followed.

He knew that soon it would be time to act.

He saw One press down the key, and was not astonished at the result, for the circuit was broken, and he only had the power to connect it.

A contemptuous smile played around the lips of Nemesis as he saw One in his vain attempt to push down the key.

A light ripple of noiseless laughter as the Grand Inquisitor ordered the man to be taken from the chair.

"Ha!" he softly said. "My time is coming."

He bent the fixed end into a good position, then taking care not to touch the former, he picked up the bottle which held the other wire.

As Twelve placed his hand on the chair, a nervous twitching seized the fingers of Nemesis, and his hand convulsively advanced the wire he held towards the other; but he restrained his impetuosity by force of will, muttering:

"Not yet—not yet! Wait—wait!"

A minute passed.

"Do you feel anything?" One asked.

"Fool!" ejaculated Nemesis, to himself, in an undertone. "Of course not!"

Soon after, he uttered a low-toned exclamation of joy, and his heart rushed into his throat, for Twelve had just stepped over the wire and sat down in his chair.

The hand of Nemesis fairly quivered, so great was his excitement.

Nearer and nearer he approached the bottle-held wire to the other.

He could hardly restrain himself from crunching them.

"No—no," he muttered. "Keep cool—keep cool! Wait until the whole strength of the battery is brought out."

Then another thought struck him.

Suppose the wires he had arranged should fuse from the intense heat of the electricity?

Further and further One pressed the key—until it was hard down.

"Do you feel anything yet?" he asked.

"No," was the smiling reply.

Then it was that with nervous, spasmodic motion Nemesis placed the two wires in contact.

The circuit completed, the terrific charge of the subtle fluid spent its force in the chair, and with a screech of the most fearful character, Twelve was half-thrown, half-jumped, spasmodically upwards and forward, a very torrent of blood gushing from his mouth, eyes and nose.

One was knocked from his chair by the force of the body's striking him ere it fell, ghastly and quivering, on the floor.

Five sprang forward and caught hold of Twelve, but drew back with a cry of pain, occasioned by a numb pain which seemed to contract the muscles of his arms; due, perhaps, to some latent force left by the terrible shock in that bleeding body.

One rose to his feet pale and trembling, and sank into his chair, completely unnerved by the catastrophe, which was in every particular beyond his comprehension.

The effect on all was immense, and particularly so on Wyman, who, in Twelve's horrible

death, saw what might have been his fate. His knees knocked together with absolute fright, and weak as a new-born babe, he sank to the floor with a moan, and covered his eyes with his hand. This action might shut out the sight of the ghastly corse, but it could not eradicate the mental picture which would not be driven away, but held his mind and imagination in unbreakable thralldom.

The others, accustomed to scenes scarcely less harrowing, kept to their feet, but no face among them all was free from a death-like pallor.

For several minutes afterward a most fearful silence pervaded the room.

Then One spoke, but in a voice so changed as to be scarcely recognizable.

It had always been deep and heavy, but now it was deeper, and trembling slightly, and its hoarseness was like the rumble of distant thunder.

"Take him away!"

As he spoke he pointed at Wyman.

"Four and Five!" he added.

They advanced, seized Wyman under the armpits, and dragged him to his feet, at which he began moaning loudly, imagining, perhaps, that his time had come, for he was too terrified to hear the words of the Grand Inquisitor. He resolutely kept his eyes covered with his hands, and in this condition was led from the room and thrown into a dungeon, other than the one he had been taken from.

The silence was dreadful.

Left alone with himself and the terrible vision that filled his brain—the companionship of a dog, a rat, a wolf—anything, would have been preferable to his forced solitude.

He pounded wildly on the door with his clenched hands until they were torn and bleeding, and begged in God's name that his jailers would return.

But they, heeding not his cries, returned to the torture chamber.

They found everything as when they left.

Not an individual had moved a step from the position he had occupied. Not a word had been uttered during their absence.

When they reached the center of the room they halted, and glanced askance at the Grand Inquisitor. By a simple inclination of his head he bade them look to the body of their stricken comrade, who was lying on his face in a pool of blood that had run from mouth and nostrils.

They turned the body over, and as the face came uppermost, they shrank back appalled.

The eyes had nearly left the sockets, and, dripping with blood as they were, the spectacle was ghastly in the extreme.

Recovering themselves, they faced One and Five, and gave the verdict—other than which none was expected:

"Dead!"

The Grand Inquisitor bowed his head in acknowledgment, then bent his head for a minute in his hand; looking up he glanced from man to man, then arose and said:

"A faithful, trustworthy man is gone from among us; how he went you all know; whether it was my fault or not I leave you to judge," and here he hesitated.

"'Twas not your fault," said one, and another and another took up the cry.

"Thank you for your frank expression. As you all know I am something of an electrician. I constructed the machine you see here, and put it up this morning. As Two will testify, it worked all right then; what has happened to it since I cannot say, but I will examine it and find out. And now we have a sad task to perform. Many a body has dissolved into a mere nothingness in yonder tub, but never yet has one of our number been consigned to it. Safety demands that the body of our faithful friend shall be committed to it. Let it be done!"

In sorrow, either mock or genuine, he turned away his head, while several toga-wrapped figures picked up the gory body, and deposited it in the tub.

The paneling was closed ere One faced his men; he simply said:

"Ready?"

"Yes," was the subdued reply.

He turned the crank that off before had hidden all traces of dark and bloody tragedies.

A few words of command, and several of the members left the room and soon returned with pails, water and mops, and then commenced wiping up the great, large pools of blood; but so it up, apply water as freely as they might, there in the carpet would remain forever a dull, red stain, a reminder of the terrible scene.

The minutes dragged slowly by, and at last One turned the crank again.

Once more arose the rippling sound of running

water, continued for some time, then cut off; the paneling was opened, the lid of the tub was raised, and found to be empty.

One dismissed all but Two.

Left alone he said:

"Let us examine the chair. I will take hold of it myself, you handle the key."

As One spoke he arose from his chair, and stepped off the platform.

For just a few seconds Nemesis was puzzled what to do; then he thought:

"Better connect it and make them think it is all right, and perhaps I may have another chance to go for them."

So he quietly connected the two ends.

One placed his hand on the arm of the brass chair, and Two pressed down the key a little way; immediately One became aware of a tingling sensation as the current passed through his body; Two pressed the key further down, giving the experimenter a severe shock.

"That will do," said One, in a puzzled, mystified tone. "The thing works all right now. What in thunder could have been the matter with it?"

"Hard telling," was the Two's terse comment.

One stepped on the platform and raised the cover of the box.

The eyes that watched them began to stare hard, and Nemesis' heart began to beat at a lively pace.

Would One take the machine apart, and thus discover that it had been tampered with?

No, he did not take it to pieces, suspecting nothing of such a nature as had actually taken place, and after a superficial examination he closed the machine, turned out the light and left the room.

CHAPTER IV.

THE DEATH OF FELIX.

"PRETTY little Robby," said Felix, in wheedling tones, as the robin, frightened by some movement of his, flew a short distance away. "Pretty little Robby. Don't be afraid of me. Come and get some more crumbs."

Perched on the foot of the bedstead, the bird dropped its head, and turned one twinkling eye on the sick boy; as if satisfied with his inspection he uttered a few chirps, dropped to the bed-clothes, and hopped slowly toward the outstretched hand that Felix presented toward him, and soon was pecking up the crumbs again.

After satisfying his hunger the robin took a short flight to the window sill, sat there a few minutes with the sun gilding his feathers, then warbled a few notes, as if thanking Felix for his kindness, spread his pinions and flew away; watching him through the open window Felix saw that he took a course straight toward the blue vaulted dome above the earth, which had never appeared bluer or prettier to the lad than at that very moment.

He watched the robin's flight until the bird was lost to sight, and then turning a grave and thoughtful face toward Amy, he said:

"Amy, that little bird's an angel."

"What makes you think so?" she quietly asked.

"Because," was the reason he vouchsafed, one supposed to be confined entirely to women, but which is sometimes found in the mouths of children. "And," added Felix, "he'll come back again, too."

"What makes you think so?"

"I don't know, but he will, though. Now see if he don't. And, Amy, when I die I'm going right up like he did."

"Sh, Felix, do stop talking about dying," protested Amy, gently.

"Who's afraid?" said Willie. "I ain't, so you needn't be. Amy, do you know what I think?"

"No."

"Do you want to know?"

"If you wish to tell me."

"Then I think that I'm going to die right soon, not long from now, and that robin came to let me know it, and—and—"

"And what?" she smilingly asked, though her voice was sad.

"And that he'll be here and guide me so that I won't hurt myself on the telegraph wires and chimneys, and things like that. Won't that be nice?"

"Very," she replied, willing to humor his odd fancies so long as assenting to them seemed to tend towards his happiness.

He ate another portion of the cake without a word, and then lay quietly on his pillow for some length of time, Amy meanwhile moving noiselessly about the room, putting things to rights, an operation which did not engage her attention so much but that her eyes rested on the bed very frequently.

All was quietness and peace.

But suddenly the scene changed.

Amy heard a choking noise, and glancing quickly toward the bed, saw Felix half convulsively rise to a sitting posture, clutch wildly at the air, and sinking back on his pillow turn over on his side.

With a cry of alarm she sprang to his side, then uttered one piercing shriek, and growing weak, grasped the bedstead for support; and a sight it was to cause the heart of any girl unaccustomed to such sights to grow sick with horror; the boy had been taken with a hemorrhage, and a great crimson tide was flowing from his mouth.

The volume of blood caused Felix to strangle, and his body shook convulsively as he endeavored to catch his breath.

Amy, poor girl, frightened nearly to death, and not knowing what to do, could only stand and add terrors to the scene by her heartrending moans.

Thirty seconds in all had elapsed from the time of her discovery when hurried footsteps were heard outside; then the door was suddenly and unceremoniously opened, and the kind-hearted physician who had attended Felix stepped into the room; half way up the last rickety flight of stairs he had heard Amy's distant, penetrating shriek, and fearful that something had gone wrong he had hurried on to learn its nature.

Once inside the room, he took the situation in instantly, and springing to the bedside, he raised Felix to a sitting position, and with his own handkerchief wiped away the strangling volume.

"Some water!" he said, sharply and quickly, "and some salt."

The authoritative, commanding tone at first startled Amy, then infused her with new strength, and letting go of her support, she darted to a closet and procured some salt, and quickly handed it, and a pail of water to the doctor.

"Hold the pail yourself," he said, sharply. "A cup!"

She procured one.

In this he threw some of the salt, added some water, then placed the cup to the lips of the unfortunate boy, and kindly but firmly, said:

"Drink this."

"I can't," was the choking reply.

"But you must!" and with deft fingers the doctor forced his mouth open, tilted up the cup, and allowed a portion of his contents to run down Felix's throat.

The good effect was immediately noticeable, for the flow of blood began rapidly diminishing, and after a larger quantity had passed down the boy's throat, it ceased altogether.

Amy, pale and trembling, watched every movement with staring eyes, and when the blood was stopped, and she saw that Felix actually breathed again, her own pent-up breath came slowly back, and she uttered a fervent:

"Thank God!"

"Ay, that you may!" said the doctor. "Had I been a minute later, he would have bled to death. Just arrange those pillows, so that he can retain his position: it helps to keep the blood down."

Amy did as directed, when the doctor took away his supporting arm, and sat down on a chair that she placed for him by the bedside.

Then, for the first time, she obtained a good look at Felix's face, and when she did it brought back to her eyes the frightened look that had been there before, for she could not help noticing a death-like pallor which had settled on his features.

His eyes were closed, and his forehead was warm and damp, and he seemed not to notice what was passing around him.

"Will he die, doctor?" asked Amy, in a tremulous whisper.

"Yes; he can't live very long, the hemorrhage has left him very weak. I expected it, but hoped it would not come. No, poor boy, his time is close at hand."

Instantly came to Amy's mind Felix's words of a short time before.

They seemed destined to be a fatal prophecy.

Holding Felix's hand, with a finger on his pulse, the doctor allowed nearly half an hour to pass, then said:

"Now, Amy—I believe that is your name—put a change of clothing on the bed, while I lift the boy out."

And while Amy stripped off the blood-dyed bed-clothing and put on that belonging to her own rougher couch, the good-hearted, noble-souled doctor held Felix in his arms, and allowed the dying boy's head to rest on his shoulder: then he put him back in the bed, keeping him in as nearly a sitting position as possible.

A short time after Felix opened his eyes and

gazed at one, then at the other, in a vacant way, as if puzzled to know what had passed; he tried to raise one wan, pale hand to his head, but when half way there it wavered a moment, then fell back heavy and limp; the boy seemed to realize all, then, and a look of dained intelligence shot across his face.

"How do you feel, Felix?" the doctor kindly asked.

"So weak—so weak," was the weary reply, as he closed his eyes again.

The doctor soon after arose, and beckoned Amy as far as the door.

"I can do no more for him," the doctor said, "he is beyond human aid. I'll come again; but watch him closely; he may drop off any minute."

Saddened, deeply saddened by the intelligence, Amy returned to the bedside heavy-hearted, and as the tears coursed quietly down her cheeks, she kept her misty eyes fastened on his face.

It was middle-afternoon, or later.

Felix's cheeks were brightened by a light flush, and he seemed to be stronger, although he still kept his eyes closed; yet that he was not asleep, Amy knew by the gentle pressure now and then of his hand in hers.

Silently the minutes fled until it was near sundown.

Then he opened his eyes; they were sparkling and bright, and intelligence beamed from them.

"Surely," thought Amy, "the doctor must have been mistaken. Surely, he is better."

But, ah! had the doctor been there, he would have told her far different—would have told her that the flush of the cheeks, the apparent strength, the bright, flashing eyes, were but the beginning of the end.

"You feel better, don't you, Felix?" she questioned.

"Yes," was the reply, in a voice clear as crystal, but low as the breathing of a summer wind, "but so weak."

"But you'll get stronger."

He sadly, slowly shook his head.

"Nay!" cried the girl, "but you must—you will!"

"Never!" he replied, in the same clear, low tone. "Never! No, Amy," he added, wearily, "I told you the truth. I wish mammy was here."

Amy was too heartbroken, her voice was too saturated with tears to answer, and turning her head, she allowed the little drops to fall fast and free.

"Don't cry," said Felix, "it makes me feel bad."

Feel bad? Then she would cry no more.

This was her resolution, and brushing away her tears, she choked back those that were crowding forward, and faced him once more.

He gazed lovingly at her, then closed his eyes, and a calm, holy silence prevailed, broken, finally, by a chirping and twitter.

"My robin!" exclaimed Felix; "I knew he'd come again. Some crumbs, Amy."

She put some in his hand, which he had just enough strength to extend towards the bird; it hopped fearlessly forward, and pecked the bits from his hand, an operation which Felix watched with loving eyes.

"Poor little bird," he softly murmured. "See him eat, Amy. Mustn't he have been hungry? But, Robby," and his voice was grave and thoughtful, "if you'll go to Heaven with me you won't ever get hungry again, for they have oranges and everything good there. Got enough, hey?"

The robin skipped away, stopped at the windowsill, and twittered a little.

"He's calling me, Amy. I'm goin'!"

She glanced at him; the color had left his cheeks; they were deathly pale again; his hand sunk to the coverlid dead and heavy.

The robin spread his pinions, and started away with rapid flight.

"Almost gone," he whispered.

Distant and more distant, until he was but a speck in the atmosphere—fading away.

"Gone!" whispered Felix, and sinking back on his pillow, his eyes closed—and all was wrapped in solemn silence.

Amy bent forward, spoke to him, touched him.

Felix replied not—he had been claimed by Death.

CHAPTER V.

TWO MORE VICTIMS.

WHEN the torture chamber was left dark and deserted, Nemesis arose from his recumbent posture, a glow of conscious triumph reddening his cheeks.

From his breast pocket he took a little book, and under two other entries, marked:

"Twelve to-night met his fate, being killed by a shock of electricity."

He then closed the book, returned it to his pocket, and muttered:

"Three of the red-handed villains have fallen beneath my avenging hand, and God help the rest, for their time is not far distant. Thirteen yet remain—woe—woe to them all!"

He had assumed a tragic attitude, and when he called on the name of Him who rules over all, he raised his hand high toward Heaven; just at that moment, with figure drawn up, eyes flashing, face covered with rigid lines of determination, he looked well-fitted to fill the avenging part he had chosen.

"But now I must to work," he muttered, and crossing the room, he lighted his dark-lantern, after doing which, he hunted up the piece of sheet brass found at the same time with the copper wire.

"I wish I had more tools," he thought, "but Samson killed thousands with the jaw-bone of an ass, why can't I do what I wish with this brass and a three cornered file."

He produced the impression in wax, that he had taken of the key-hole of One's dressing-room, and after studying it closely for a short while and taking some measures, he filed off a narrow strip of the brass; he made an impromptu vise to hold the brass while he was filing it, by holding between his knees tightly, a piece of board whose end had been slightly split.

With no tools but a three cornered file, the task before him became extremely tedious and difficult; but Nemesis was working with a purpose, and tired not, nor thought of giving up.

Steadily as clockwork he filed away, until the strip of brass had somewhat the semblance of a key; then he began working more slowly and carefully, so as not to, by rash work, spoil that which he had already done.

He had worked steadily for some hours, when a rap came at his door.

He opened it to find Celeste standing there.

"Good-morning," said she, "won't you come to some breakfast?"

"Thank you, yes!" he replied, and closing and locking his door, he followed her to the outer room and took his seat at the table again; a jubilant expression on his face did not escape the crazy girl's sharp eyes, and she said:

"You seem happy."

"I feel so."

"Why?"

"Because soon a dread band of human devils shall be swept from the face of the earth."

She looked at him, and a puzzled look o'erspread her face.

"Human devils!" she vacantly repeated. "Who are they? Why do you call them so?"

Nemesis never yet had spoken a word to Celeste about the Red Circle's fiendish doings, but now, a little off his guard, he rejoined:

"Because they entice men to enter here and then foully murder them."

"But that's not wrong!" said Celeste.

Nemesis started at this bold declaration, and glanced quickly at the speaker; but he found her face the seat of innocence; not wrong! He pitied her! But what would have been his feelings had he known the part she enacted?

He had been soundly sleeping during the time that she was absent from the room working her wiles on Wyman, and never knew that she had even left the room.

His face saddened as he looked pityingly at Celeste, and beneath his breath he could not forbear murmuring:

"Poor girl—poor girl! May God in Heaven have mercy on her."

His look of compassion, of sadness, was observed by Celeste, and imagining herself the cause, she arose and putting her arms around his neck with childish freedom, she kissed him and said:

"Is Celeste wrong?" then drawing away a little, she went on: "If she is you must forgive her, for everything here," and she placed her hand on her head. "goes b-b-z-z-z all day long, and sometimes it goes like this," and with the forefinger of her right hand she kept making wavy circles in the air.

"No—no," cried Nemesis, "you are as innocent of actual wrong as a babe unborn," and he held up his arms, into which Celeste fled with a happy little cry.

Nemesis softly stroked her, and as he did so, he caught himself wondering what feeling prompted it; was it pity? He thought not. Was it natural tenderness? No. A desire to please the crazy girl? Hardly. What then could it be but love?

"What?" thought Nemesis, "can I really love

this crazy girl? No, I must be mistaken;" then he said, aloud: "Celeste, I must leave you now, for I have work to do."

Reluctantly she allowed him to return to his room and lock himself in. He went to work on the key again, and after several hours of ceaseless labor, he had the satisfaction of holding it in his hand—finished.

But would it work? That was the great question. He determined to make a trial.

Putting on mask and toga, he left his room, went through the outer one where Celeste sat sewing, down the staircase and into the hall, along which he glided until he stood in front of the dressing-room.

A furtive glance around showed him that the coast was clear, and with quick but steady fingers he inserted his key in the lock; an instant, he exerted a gentle pressure, and the door was unlocked.

An inward exclamation of joy escaped Nemesis as his success became apparent; he opened the door, glanced into the apartment, then closed the door, locked it and stole noiselessly along through the halls until he entered torture chamber A. Here was a safe between whose iron sides reposed the secret of many a death, and many valuables stripped from many a victim; this safe it was that had attracted Nemesis hither.

It was of a kind now called old-fashioned, with a lock opened by a key of peculiar shape, instead of a revolving knob with a combination of numbers.

Nemesis greatly desired to see the interior of the safe, and had come to get an impression in wax of the keyhole.

This obtained, he began beating a rapid but noiseless retreat; he had almost reached the point, when he noticed an end of rope dangling against the wall, and fastened higher up, to a cleft.

He knew not to what it belonged, yet on a venture he undid it from the cleft, and then proceeded on his way.

Several hours passed, and the Cobweb was brilliantly lighted up; a figure strayed in from out doors, and saluted Ned, had a drink and lounged around until another entered, wearing, as he had himself, a death's-head pin.

"How are you, Pete?"

"Middlin'! How's yourself?"

"Only so—so," replied Ben Stover, known as number Eleven, spotter. "Any luck?"

"No. Any with you?"

"Nary," was the terse reply of Peter Benson, number Eight, spotter.

They dallied around the saloon for a while, then proposed going inside; they passed through the back room, and arm in arm descended the steps down which Wyman had been lured the night before; unconscious of any danger impending, the two spotters tripped lightly down the steps, until they reached the last one; below that they knew was a trap through which many a victim had been hurled, but they thought not of it now; it never had been opened for a friend, why should they think so now?

They were on the lowest step, and advanced a foot simultaneously; their feet touched the floor, then came a sudden sense of sinking, and clutching each other wildly for support that neither could afford, they went headlong through the trap; no net was stretched to catch them, there was nothing to break their fall, and whirling head over heels they darted downward until they struck on the hard pavement below with a dull thud, a groan, a smothered shriek, and all was quietness.

Half an hour passed, then One, who had stepped from Broadway into the Cobweb, left by the back entrance, and commenced the descent of the stairs.

He was thinking, and walked slowly, and from some reason stopped for a minute on the last step, his foot rested on the trap, he felt it going; by a great muscular effort he managed to throw himself forward, and as he went downward he clutched the flagging with his hands, his fingers rested against a projection, and he drew himself into safety.

Rising to his feet, he stood there trembling, scarce knowing whether to curse or be thankful for his escape.

He hurried back into the hall, and found the rope governing the trap hanging loose; with a fearful imprecation on the head of whoever had been so careless or designing, he fastened it up and entered the rooms; Dandy Ned had told him that Eight and Eleven had passed in; he could not find them; a horrible misgiving crossed his mind, and he hurried to the receiving dungeon; he opened the door, flung it back, and there, on the floor, saw by the rays of the light he carried, two gory bodies; Eight's head was literally crush-

ed to a jelly, and he was dead; Eleven's head was also badly broken, but he still breathed, though with difficulty; One's presence seemed to arouse him, and he opened his eyes; fixedly he gazed on One for a moment, then his gaze wavered, then return to the chief's face, and the dying man's lips moved; One bent forward to catch what was said.

"Curses on the day I joined you!" was the bitter invective. "I am dying, and hell is my portion, *forever!*" and the word seemed to rise and fall like the wail of the damned. "But your time is coming—coming," and he raised himself on his left elbow, and slowly raising his right arm, pointed his finger at One; he seemed transfigured in his dying moments, and his eyes gleamed with prophetic fire as he hissed out: "Yes, coming—coming—coming—the Red Circle is DOOMED!"

His strength was now exhausted, and he sank heavily back on the floor, rested thus a moment, and then with the vilest curses falling from his lips he drifted into eternity.

Awed, appalled, One stood there, silent, listening to the words that echoed and re-echoed in his brain:

"The Red Circle is DOOMED!"

It was the dying man's prophecy!

And One dreaded it, feared it, cursed it!

CHAPTER VI.

WYMAN IS SAVED AGAIN.

NEVER in all his long career of crime had One been brought face to face with anything that made him shiver and quake as the sight of his dying slave, combined with his fearful curse and terrible prophecy.

He turned pale as a ghost, and clutched the door-post for support, and thus remained for some few minutes after the wretched ruffian had breathed his last.

Then he turned away, and sick and faint at heart, staggered along the hall to the Star Chamber, where he fell into a chair, and buried his face in his hands. Here were five of his men gone in less than a week, three of whom he had seen dead, two of whom had disappeared. A conviction somehow began to force itself on his mind that they, too, had in some way met with death, for he had judged them too loyal and true to desert him.

He was sad and distressed in mind.

Not that he cared so much for their lives, but underlying this was a mystery which he could not understand.

Twelve had been killed through the strangest action of an electrical current that he had ever seen. He had thought deeply on the matter, but could find no solution to the thing. Had the current refused to work properly after the catastrophe, he would have examined the machine and chair, and thus would have necessarily learned that it had been tampered with. As it did work, and without the slightest hitch, he could see no need of an examination, and accordingly classed this, to him, phenomenon, under the head of unexplainable mysteries. And then the trap-door. It must have been left open on purpose—but by whom?

"Can there be a traitor among us?"

In his mind he ran over man after man of the gang. No, they were all thorough villains, delighting in bloodshed and wickedness, and could not be traitors, any of them.

A footfall disturbed his reverie, and looking up he saw Two and Four enter the room, and then, shortly after, the spotters, Eleven and Fourteen. It lacked but a quarter of an hour of midnight, by which time all of the gang, except number Three, otherwise Dandy Ned, and Fifteen, who had charge of the outside door, were present. Then One arose slowly, and stood perfectly silent, his keen, searching eyes resting momentarily on each man.

His face was pale and slightly haggard, and the men all knew that it portended something.

Then One opened his mouth, and in low, thrilling tones he gave them a short account of what had so nearly happened to himself, and had actually befallen two of the number. In concluding, he asked:

"Can any one of you give me any information concerning the trap-doors being open?"

Each man replied in the negative.

"There is one other," said One. "Eleven, go and relieve Fifteen a little while, and direct him here."

Eleven went out, and taking Fifteen's place as sentinel, sent him to the Star Chamber.

Close examination on One's part failed to elicit any information from Fifteen; he knew absolutely nothing; not a one of the gang had entered

during the day, and the two victims of the trap were the first after dark, and One the next; that was all he could say.

"Mystery—mystery!" muttered One, and he, by some fine sense of feeling, felt that in some way the dying man's prophecy was being fulfilled.

"You may return to your post," he said to Fifteen, after the questionings were over; and when the keeper of the door had gone, he addressed himself to the remaining members of the Red Circle.

"Boys," he said, "it seems as if luck had taken a turn and is giving us the cold shoulder. By an accident a few days ago we lost Twelve, one of our best men. To-night, by what looks like a singular fatality, two more have been claimed by death. Two others have disappeared, and no trace of them can be found. What it may mean I cannot say, yet I do not believe that either man would prove a traitor; in fact, they may not be far away, may return at any minute, and we will hope that such will be the case."

Ah! they had gone; their absence puzzled him, yet his wildest imaginations did not conceive the truth.

"Poor fellows!" he continued, referring to the two victims of the trap. "They are dead! But one thing remains to be done. I will go to torture chamber 'A.' You, Eleven, Fourteen, Six, Five, any of you, all of you, bring thither the bodies."

Accompanied by his right-hand man, Two, One made his way to the room he had mentioned, and taking his seat on the platform, he silently waited for the closing scene in the drama of the existence of two hardened, blood-stained wretches, whose career of guilt and crime had been cut short by—accident, so it seemed to One, but rather, in truth, by the avenging hand of Nemesis, who at that very moment was lying prone on the floor, with eye applied to the little knot-hole, intently watching to see what transpired below.

He knew from One's being there without other company that Two, that something was wrong, since it was out of the ordinary custom at that hour of the night.

He did not have to wait long for the solution of their presence, as soon after the others filed in bearing the dead bodies; seeing the faces he at once recognized them, and wondered how they met their fate; this was explained when one said to Two:

"Henceforth nothing like this shall ever happen; that rope shall be replaced by a chain which shall be secured by a lock of which I will carry the key."

"Ha—ha!" was the mental ejaculation of Nemesis; "then *this* is the result of loosening the rope. Happy thought! Ha—ha! in the midst of their wickedness shall they be cut down. Two more to my score—that makes five who have fallen by my hand. Curses on you, murderous crew, how do you feel now? Do you begin to tremble?"

Though he knew it not, nearly every one of the gang held a secret quaking in his heart, a dread—of *something*—what, they knew not.

The bodies were placed in the tub by the orders of One, who again turned the little crank in the wall; then turning about, he said:

"No business, to-night, gentlemen," meaning that all rules of order were suspended.

Immediately the gang broke up in little parties of twos and threes, and in earnest tones discussed the singular fate that had befallen their companions; minutes fled by and lengthened into hours; One turned the crank again, and there arose once more a rippling, liquid sound; this continued for some minutes, and then the tub was opened, and found to be entirely empty.

It was by this time hard on toward morning, and after consulting his watch, One gave the order to disperse for the night.

"Are you not going to put this Wyman to torture?" asked Two.

"No."

"Why not?"

"It is too late, for one thing. Another is that I am very tired, and another is that a little lonesomeness after what he saw will work his mind up to such a pitch of fear that he will make a full confession without causing us much trouble."

"Do you think he'll confess for the mere asking?" asked Two.

"No; we will no doubt have to put him to torture."

"What will it be?"

"The girdle of knives."

"Very well, so we will understand it. Good-night!"

"The same to you," said One, as Two left the

room, an example which he shortly afterwards followed, having first turned off the light.

For the first time Nemesis arose from his recumbent posture, the long continuance of which had made him as stiff as a cow's horn.

"They are going to put him in the girdle of knives, hey?" he mused, and a sarcastic smile quivered on his lips. "That gives me some work to do. It is well I inspected the machine when I did; but now to sleep."

It was about nine o'clock when Celeste knocked at his door, and informed him that breakfast was ready; after finishing the meal, he retired to his own room, and taking out the piece of sheet brass and the file, and working hard, he had soon made several strips about three quarters of an inch wide and six inches long.

Then he took out toga and mask, and donned them, opened the door, and carrying brass strips, file and dark lantern, passed into Celeste's room, then to the main room, listened respectfully to a few loving yet fear-filled admonitions from the crazy girl, then descended the stairs, and made his way to torture-chamber "B," in which was the dreadful instrument of torture—the girdle of knives.

As has been intimated, he had before examined the machine quite thoroughly, and understood perfectly its whole construction.

As will be remembered, one segment of the girdle was stationary, while the other was movable, and closed by means of a crank attached to it; it will also be remembered that the movable portion ran on a track, an ingenious and queer arrangement in itself, since it held the segment to it as firm as rock; it was this sliding portion to which Nemesis turned his attention, and by means of the strips of brass, he soon fixed the movable part in such a way that moving it forward was out of the question; this point he tested himself, exerting all his strength, even to a point which threatened to break all the straps connected with the crank; it remained solid as a rock.

As he let go of the crank, a low laugh burst from his lips.

"Ha—ha—ha! I defy them to harm him now, unless they thrust him against the knives with their hands. They will try the thing; it will not work, and they will not be able to discover why, for I have done well. Ha—ha—ha! Devils, fiends—all, tremble! cringe! cower in fear! your time is near at hand!"

Picking up the light he retreated silently through the hall and regained his own room in safety, ensconced in which he commenced work on a key for opening the safe.

It lacks five minutes of midnight.

In torture room "B" the whole murderous gang are gathered, inquisitors and spotters.

"Bring in the victim," commanded One, and a few minutes later Wyman is marched in guarded by two masked figures. All of his clothing had been removed, and a pair of tights was the only article of attire he wore.

At that moment Nemesis lay above torture room "A," vainly hoping to be able to learn something of the way that things went. It was useless, yet still he lay there, listening, watching, waiting.

"Will you answer the questions asked you night before last?" asked One, of pale-faced, trembling Wyman, whose answer was a noiseless working of his lower jaw.

"Will you?" was the stern-voiced demand.

"I can't!" gasped Wyman. "The information in your hands, you would make use of it—would rob me of all, and leave my wife and children to starvation."

The half made appeal for wife and children awoke no tender chord in One's breast, and in a gruff voice, he exclaimed:

"Obstinate fool!" Then to Two: "Fasten him in the machine."

The trembling, frightened wretch struggled hard, but it was only as the weak efforts of a lamb as opposed to the ravening wolf.

In less than two minutes he was firmly secured.

"Will you confess?"

A groan was the only reply.

"Five, crank!"

As commanded, Five, a tall, broad shouldered, powerfully built man, advanced and seized hold of the crank.

"Close up the machine!"

It worked easily a single turn, and then stopped, as the strap brought up taut, and the machine moved not; One, not understanding fully the cause of the stoppage, and not waiting for an explanation, cried, short and sharp:

"Why don't you turn?"

"It sticks!"

"Nonsense!" was the contemptuous rejoinder. "Turn, though it drag your very heart out."

"So be it," muttered Five, and exerting himself he moved the crank slowly around; the machine moved not, the crank moved only to the extent that the strap stretched.

Wyman's eyes were nearly starting from his head, so great was the agony he suffered; yet as the machine remained immovable, and he remembered his sudden deliverance before, a gleam of hope, faint, yet perceptible, lighted up his face.

"Turn!" cried One, angrily. "Turn!"

Five brought every ounce of strength and weight to bear.

There came a squeaking sound, the movable segment quivered, the strap began to stretch more rapidly.

"Turn!"

Another great effort, there came a snap, the strap parted, the movable segment burst its fastening to the track, moved a single instant, and fell in Five's direction; he jumped back to avoid the falling iron frame, the upper edge of which however struck him violently in the stomach; the intense pain doubled him up, and the next moment with a groan he pitched forward, headlong into the upturned interior of the segment, and was literally impaled on the upward pointing blades.

"Ye Gods!" ejaculated One. "Quick! Help him!"

Three or four jumped forward, bent over, seized hold of Five's clothing, lifted him up, and then laid him on the floor on his back; he still lived, although they instantly saw that he soon must die, for from every portion of his body the blood was spurting.

The most hideous gash of all was where one of the blades had penetrated nearly through his throat.

His teeth had been closely set, his lips tightly closed; but now they parted, and as the blood came frothing forth, he gasped convulsively for breath; but the air he breathed only went as far as the gash in his throat, and then rushed forth with a harsh, sputtering sound, scattering the blood around in drops like crimson rain.

It was indeed a horrifying spectacle, yet one well suited to others that had transpired in that room again and again.

The dying man battled hard for life, but was beaten in the contest, for soon his limbs began twitching and jerking, and spasms swept over his entire body; and the final and most severe of all, drew him to a nearly sitting position, gave one deep groan, and then his wide open, staring eyes began to glaze.

The light of life, slowly departing, was gone at last.

For nearly half a minute the body remained as drawn by the spasm, then it fell back heavily, and all was over.

Again had Wyman's life been saved.

And as before, at the expense of one of his torturers.

CHAPTER VII.

DRISCOLL, AND EVENS, THE DETECTIVE.

AFTER receiving the flat rebuff from Mrs. Brophy, Tim Driscoll, the unwelcome suitor of Amy, remained away, much to the joy of the young girl, who could not understand why he had been so persistent in the face of repeated refusals.

She was afraid of him, and when chance offered would fly his presence as from a plague, and so bad had matters become that she had even attempted making herself a grave in the river, and would have done so but for the intervention of Rodney Ransom.

After that, several times she determined to fly from the house of Mrs. Brophy and go anywhere that would afford her safety from his persecutions; but one thing bound her to Mrs. Brophy's house, and that was—Felix. She had tended him as a baby, had watched him grow up, and his bright, sharp ways endeared him to her; still she determined to go, and one day she had even packed up her few things, intending to leave after sundown; but ere that time came Felix had been brought in, pale and inanimate, and covered with blood.

She thought him dead, but a kind-hearted physician, who had followed those who carried the poor boy, soon set her mind at rest on that score, although he held out but small hopes of his ever recovering.

Amy could leave Felix when well and strong, but bruised, maimed, dying—never!

No, even as much as she dreaded Driscoll, she determined to remain by Felix's side to the last, and the reader already knows how well she did.

her duty, and how great was her relief at the non-appearance of her persecutor.

Yet, though she saw him not, Driscoll was not idle, but was laying plans against her future peace.

For the first day after his rebuff by Mrs. Brophy, he cursed her up hill and down; the second day his anger somewhat moderated, and he began to dream of waylaying Amy and carrying her off; the third he made up his mind to do this, and compel her to marry him; the fourth he even went as far as making some preliminary arrangements, but on the fifth his natural cowardice got the upper hand, and his schemes fell flat to the ground.

"D— it!" he muttered, "I'm going to make something out of my knowledge, or I'll break a leg. If I could make her marry me I'd do a good thing; but perhaps that won't go through. I wonder if I hadn't better see Evens? Wonder how much he'd pay to know what I do?"

A word here—a few words—concerning Driscoll's character and occupation.

The latter was that of a spy and informer—in short, a "pimp" for detectives. He would insinuate himself in the confidence of criminals, get what evidence he could, and then hand it to some professional detective, unless the criminal would come down heavy.

His occupation outlines his character, so of that we need say nothing more, except that it was as despicable as ever existed in human frame.

"Guess I'll go and see Evens," he remarked, to himself.

He made his way to Murray street, climbed some wearisome flights of stairs, and entered an office bearing the words on the door:

"EZRA EVENS.

"Private Detective."

Evens, writing at his desk, looked up as the door opened.

"Ah, Driscoll, is that you?"

"Yes. How goes it?"

"Good enough! Sit down!" and the detective waved his hand toward a chair. "Anything new?"

"No, not particularly," said Driscoll, but in a way that was meant to convey a meaning somewhat opposed to the words.

Evens understood Driscoll well enough to understand the reply, so said:

"Anything old then?"

"Not as I know on. Just dropped in to see if you had anybody you wanted piked off."

"Not just now. So things are dull with you?"

"Yes, hain't made a red in a week."

"That's bad!" said Evens. "Now if you could only find that girl I want, you could make a nice spec."

"Yes, I suppose so," said Driscoll, glad that Evens had introduced the subject. "What are the figures for finding her?"

"Say two hundred—I'd be willing to give that much."

"And how much more?"

"No more."

"Two hundred's hardly enough to pay for shoe-leather—searching for her; a thousand dollars, now, and I could find her!" and Driscoll tossed his head and squirted a mouthful of tobacco juice out of the window.

A suspicion crossed Evens' mind that Driscoll already knew where the girl was, and was "playing him for a sucker," so he said, plumply:

"Five hundred dollars if you drop on the girl, not a cent more."

"I'll take it," said Driscoll, coolly, adding in his mind, "d—n it, a bird in the hand's worth two in the bush."

"Then you really know where she is?"

"Yes."

"And know her to be the right party?"

"Of course."

"And can prove it?"

"Yes."

"How?"

"By this," and Driscoll drew from an inside pocket a little black-covered diary, which he slapped several times in the palm of his left hand.

"Ah, what is that? Let me see it?"

"Not much," said Driscoll, with a knowing grin, "not for Joe! Let's get down to business now?"

And the two unprincipled, hardened men compared notes, talked and laid plans whereby innocent Amy was to be forced into their net.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SPECTER AT THE BEDSIDE.

THE witnesses of Five's terrible death uttered no word, but turning, glanced askance at each other.

What did these numerous accidents mean? Was it a visitation of Divine power for their misdeeds?

Not one among them all but wished himself at that moment thousands of miles away from the spot; not one whose brain did not contain the thought:

"Will my turn come next?"

A gasping sound from the direction of the platform drew every eye on One, who had assumed a standing position; his face was livid, and his frame shook with a convulsive tremulousness.

It was not the death alone that agitated him, part was due to a spectacle which none but himself had seen, a dying scene in which been made a prophecy that the Red Circle was destined soon to be swept from the face of the earth.

He had arisen to speak to his followers when the sudden recollection rushed upon him in all its hideous detail, and involuntarily he gasped for breath.

It had always been his pride that no spectacle could move him, and he had long delighted in showing his men that in cruelty he could be a devil incarnate; he saw their eyes turned upon him, knew that they must have noticed his agitation; cursing himself for his weakness in betraying it, his anger arose fierce and hot, and suddenly observing the horrified Wyman, the innocent cause of Five's death, One snatched out a revolver, and pointing it at the captive's head, yelled:

"D— you, die!"

But even as his finger pressed the trigger, while Wyman was shaking like a reed blown by the wind, One changed his mind.

"No," he savagely cried. "Twould be too easy a death! No, I'll torture you into a hell on earth, and wrest your money from you with the dying rattle in your throat!"

Then turning to his men he glanced from one to the other; before this night they had been accustomed to quail before his gaze, but now, driven to desperation by the dreadful fate of so many of their number they returned his gaze defiantly; a crisis had arrived and One knew it; he drew his form erect, selected a man, kept his eyes fastened on him while he held his revolver half raised; for a few seconds the man met One's gaze, then his own fell and he was a slave again; another and another succumbed under those basilisk eyes, and soon all were under subjection; the crisis had passed, One was master again; he said not a word about the victory, but in low, stern, commanding tones uttered these words:

"Let no man of you cross my wishes, as he values his life! Five has met a peculiar fate, but it could not be avoided. Four, Thirteen! Take yon body to the tub!"

Like whipped curs they crawled forward, picked up the body and conveyed it to torture room A, and placed it in the tub, an operation which Nemesis gleefully watched, as, before consigning the body to it, Four had illuminated the room; a low laugh more inward than audible played about his mouth, and he muttered:

"My work did more than I expected; thank God, one more villain is well rid of!"

"Now," said One, when the ghastly burden of Four and Thirteen had disappeared, "unbind that man!"

This was speedily done.

"Now follow me."

He strode into room A, and mounting the platform, turned the crank, then faced his men, saying:

"Fasten him in the chair!"

As the words fell on Wyman's ears, he uttered a fearful shriek of terror, and yelled in wildest of accents:

"No—no—no! Good God! no—no!"

Like a madman he struggled to break away, for the scene there enacted was seared deeply in his brain; but his struggles were useless, and in a very few minutes he was fastened in the chair.

"Will you confess?" cried One, at the same moment pressing the key down.

As the wave-like thrill of electricity entered Wyman's body, he became fairly a maniac—but dumb!

"Will you confess?"

He tried to form an affirmative reply, but his lips remained firmly fixed together; he could utter no sound save a dumb sounding moan now and then.

Further and further down the key was pressed.

ed, until Wyman fairly shook as the current shot through his body.

"Speak!" yelled One, wild with fury. "Speak!" But his command was unheeded.

"D— you!" he shouted; "die!"

He shoved the key hard down, and with his satanic features lighted with fiendish joy, glanced at the victim; but instead of wild shrieks of dying agony, a look of relief crossed Wyman's face, rested there a minute, then light and reason faded from face and eye.

They hurried to his side, and looked at him, and found that he had merely fainted.

One, more bold than the rest, touched a finger to the chair, but felt no electrical current in it.

Nemesis had forebore breaking the current until the last minute, fearing that it might possibly lead to his discovery; but when Wyman's life depended on it, he hesitated no longer, but separated the two wires.

Quickly One understood that the machine was acting mysteriously again, and in a perfect state of frenzy, he leaped to his feet, and yelled:

"Hell and damnation! Mystery! Can I not kill that wretch? I will, though the devil and all his imps try to stop me! Take him away! Cast him into the steam room! Here you, Thirteen; get up steam, and lively, too," he added, in a threatening tone.

One was wild—crazy with rage.

Wyman was released, and taken to the steam-room, where he was left.

But his time had not yet come, for Thirteen came back with the report that fuel was exhausted, at which One fairly gnashed his teeth.

Soon he saw that as long as he did not control himself, he could not expect to control his men; so, exerting his will, he hid every mark of rage, and in half a minute was the old, cool, clear-headed, quietly devilish leader of the Red Circle; and in a voice surprising in its calmness, he said:

"My boys, there is some mystery hanging over us, which, I confess, I do not understand. As you saw, it put me beside myself, to some extent, but it is all over now. Let us disperse quietly now. To-morrow night we will meet at the usual hour, and between this and that time I will do my best to find out what it is that overshadows us, and then we will discuss our relations to each other. I wish Eleven to stay in this room on guard until I come to relieve him. I would advise remaining until then in your rooms here, although you may do as you wish," and finishing, he sat down.

Not one of them but was glad to get away from the place, so they followed One's advice, and dispersed.

He remained long enough to turn the crank a second time, and thus carry away the last vestige of a once faithful follower.

Then, with gloomy brow and troubled mind, he stalked from the room, entered his dressing-room, and thence went rapidly along the narrow passage that connected the elegant Fifth Avenue mansion—the home of a reputed aristocrat, but more properly a human fiend—to one of the foulest of hells ever conceived on earth.

He then slipped off the toga and mask, and threw himself on the bed.

His mind was worked up by the mystery surrounding the late horror he had witnessed, and sleep was next to impossible; he tried to think of those horrid spectacles in a cool manner, but ever and anon there would pop up in imagination the scene beneath the trap; vivid as reality he would see the dying man, and plain and shrill he could hear the dying curse, his fearful prophecy.

He had wished to remain awake, but now he courted sleep—courted it as he had never done before, and finally it came, bringing, however, but little relief, for his mind ran riot, and horrible dreams racked him like truthful pictures.

Again and again he dozed, only to awake with a start and a gasp.

Once he saw himself surrounded by stone walls; the space he occupied was a small, six feet by eight room; at one end was an iron door, at the other a barred window; where was he? Soon he knew; he was in a cell, waiting death by strangulation; the hour came, he was led forth to the gallows, surrounding which was a sea of upturned faces; the noose was adjusted around his neck; a thud, a jar, and gasping for breath he awoke to find himself pulling tight the ends of a sheet which had by some means gotten around his neck.

He groaned with horror, and determined to sleep no more, but soon was slumbering again; he dreamed once more.

He was being pursued by an avenger who had sworn to kill him; he fled, twisted, turned,

doubled, all to no purpose; grim as death, and as certain, the avenger followed; he fled all day long, and put up at night at a hotel, went to bed, fell asleep; hours passed on, and he awoke to find the avenger by his bedside, with an upraised knife, prepared to plunge the gleaming steel into his heart, and here he really awoke.

Shivering with an indefinable fear, he raised his eyes above him, then a low groan fell from his lips, for standing beside the bed was a dimly outlined, spectral figure, holding poised in hand a gleaming blade.

For a moment he was chained in terror, then with a low cry he flung himself bodily towards the specter; but it faded away before his approach, and striking heavily on the floor, he lay there groaning: "Doomed—doomed—doomed!"

CHAPTER IX.

ANOTHER VICTIM OF THE CHAIR.

AND now we must pick up the thread of our story at the point where Nemesis, by breaking the electrical current, saved Wyman's life, and threw One into such a fit of wild frenzy.

Lying there, he shivered with horror as he heard One issue his rapid, fiendish orders, to convey Wyman to the steam-room, and to light the fires under the boiler.

His first impulse was to rise and fly to the unfortunate man's rescue, but a little reflection showed how useless this would be; so he crouched closer to the floor, watched and listened, and when he heard Thirteen return and say that the fuel was exhausted, his heart jumped for joy, since he felt sure that this meant a reprieve to Wyman, for, at least, twenty-four hours.

He listened on, and heard all that followed, and on all but one point he felt easy in mind: and this point was—that if One made a thorough examination, then and there, of the electrical machine, he must necessarily know that it had been tampered with, a conclusion which Nemesis would have given worlds rather than have him arrive at.

He feared that an examination of the machine would be the first step that One would take, but in this he was happily mistaken, since the chief of the Red Circle departed with the mere promise to his men of making a complete investigation on the morrow.

"It's all right, then," muttered Nemesis, in a gay and happy tone. "Before to-morrow I'll remove every trace of the wires I have had connected with it."

But he then did not foresee an obstacle in the shape of Eleven, who, in One's next breath, was ordered to remain in the room as a guard.

"However," murmured the avenger, "the wires must be removed, and he shall not stand in my way."

He remained perfectly quiet, and saw the gang leave the room in a body, and afterward saw One go, leaving on guard Eleven.

What to do precisely, Nemesis could hardly see: so he rolled over on the floor, and resting on his back, with doubled up arms under his head for a pillow, he strove, by gazing into the darkness above him, to outline there some method of action.

The wires had to be removed!

There was no getting around that fact.

Had the way been clear, two minutes would have sufficed for the job; but such was not the case, for a man was guarding the room and machine.

Not that he felt afraid of the man at all, but if the members of the gang had taken One's advice, and decided to remain in their respective dressing-rooms, it would be a most risky piece of business to hazard an encounter with the guard, as a single cry of his would draw others to the spot, and then—his game of vengeance would be over; he would be destroyed, instead of himself being a destroyer.

An hour or more passed by, and still he could see no way out of his difficulty.

On the impulse of the moment, he rolled over flat on his stomach, and applied his eye to the spy-hole.

The torture-room was still brilliantly lighted, and Eleven was pacing slowly to and fro, and as he walked, he made company in his loneliness by conversing with himself in low tones.

A portion of his remarks were audible to Nemesis, who drank in the substance of his words with greedy avidity.

"Hang it!" growled Eleven, "I'm getting sick of this, I'm going to get out of it, come what may, and that is the way I shall vote to-morrow night. Devil take the luck, but why did I ever trust myself so completely in one man's power! He rules us with a rod of iron, and blind fools

that we all are, he has in his keeping every cent of the shares belonging to each of us. He can pack up and skedaddle any night with all the money, and then—the money for which I have made myself a murderer, for which I have been a slave for years, will be gone.

"Curses on the devil in human shape!

"God help him if he plays me false!

"And what can be the meaning of these mysterious deaths and sudden disappearances?

"And why do I shudder when I think of it? Is it a warning for me?"

The next minute he gave a sudden start, caught his breath, and shuddering, stopped in his walk, for he heard, or fancied he heard, as if coming from a distance:

"It is!"

"Pshaw!" muttered Eleven, angrily, "I'm getting childish! 'Twas my imagination!"

But such was not the case, for Nemesis, without second thoughts, had seized the opportunity to utter in a low tone the two little words that conveyed so much meaning.

With contracted brow, Eleven resumed his lonely walk, and finally stopping before the electrical chair, he said:

"Hang it all, curse you! you destroyed the best friend I had," and then, his lips curling, he sank back into the chair, saying: "See if you will treat me the same."

He sank back in the chair, and dropping his head into a comfortable position, stared hard at the ceiling and dropped into a reverie; he was tired and somewhat worn out through the excitement of the few previous days, and ere long Nemesis saw his eyelids quiver, fall shut, then open spasmodically, as if Eleven knew that he was drifting into dreamland, and was struggling to keep awake; this was repeated a number of times, and then his lids remained closed, and Nemesis saw that his chest arose and fell with the regularity of sleep.

Then he arose to his feet, a satisfied smile playing around his mouth, which nevertheless looked hard, and cold, and cruel; he had resolved on the sleeper's death.

Lighting his dark lantern he opened the door of his room, stepped noiselessly through that of Celeste, not arousing her from her sleep, crossed the outer room, descended the stairs and stepped into the hall.

Silently he glided along the hall, and finally stopped when he stood beside the electrical machine; a nilt sticking from Eleven's clothing attracted his attention, and stealing softly to the sleeping man's side, he seized hold of the object, pulled slowly on it, and a second later had in his possession a long-bladed, keen-edged dagger, a very valuable acquisition.

Stepping back to the platform he took hold of the key, and gave it a sudden downward shove.

With a groan as the current rushed through his body, Eleven woke.

For a moment Nemesis moderated the current to allow the red-handed wretch to see by whom his death was caused; Eleven's eyes fell on the face of Nemesis, a look of surprise followed, then he half started with the intention of leaving the chair.

But quick as thought, Nemesis increased the current until its strength prevented Eleven's moving, and then he said slowly, coolly, decisively:

"Your time has come!"

"Pity me! Spare me!" gasped the terror-stricken villain.

"Never!"

"For God's sake!" he groaned.

"No, you never spared others, neither will I spare you. You are doomed!"

A thought seemed to flash across the half-paralyzed brain of Eleven, and he opened his lips, but ere they could frame a cry for assistance Nemesis jammed the key hard down.

There came a low-toned wail, a half sigh, a light thud as he arose a little from the shock, and then fell back; a quiver then swept over his frame, his body, limp as a dishrag, settled back in a shape to conform to the chair-back. his eyelids partially closed over the glazing eyeballs, his lower jaw dropped, he had become a victim of the avenger's hand.

No look of regret, or compassion, or pity, was visible in the face of Nemesis; it was as hard-looking and cold as stone.

He let go of the key, advanced to the side of the chair, and looked more closely at the man to make certain of his death.

This assured, he was about to convey him to the tub, when he suddenly desisted from any such endeavor, muttering, as he did so:

"No; I'll leave him thus! 'Twill answer my purpose better, for it will create a hell of anguish and fear in the hearts of those that see

him. His death will be a mystery, and they will feel the torture of wondering who will follow next. So it shall be! And now to fix the wires."

He took off the cover of the machine, disconnected the wires, connected them properly again, and coiling up the copper wire he had used he placed it to one side while he proceeded to the spot where the safe stood, and which he visited for the purpose of learning whether the key he had made would work.

He found that it would not throw back the bolt of the lock, although he knew that a slight alteration, if properly made, would make it fit.

After satisfying himself as to what was necessary to be done to it, he arose from his kneeling position before the safe, picked up his dark lantern, left the room, stole silently along until he arrived before the door of One's dressing-room, which he had made a key to fit.

Entering the room he closed the door behind him, and then commenced examining the paneling at the back; he soon succeeded in finding the outlines of a door, and opening it, he stepped into a narrow passage which he followed without halting until he was forced to, when, having mounted a long series of steps, it came to an end.

He had his head beside the wall that barred his way, but for some moments heard no sound whatever, and then the silence was broken by a snore, and then the turning of somebody in bed.

Waiting until satisfied that the sleeper was composed to rest again, he brought the powerful rays of his bull's eyes to bear, and before long had discovered the method of removing the barrier from his way.

It was a risky piece of business he was undertaking, but throwing fear to the winds, he opened the door and stepped into the room.

Standing silent and noiseless, he saw the faint outlines of a bed, and on it a human figure; an exultant cry, low but none the less joyous, fell from his lips, and toward the bed he went, his softly taken steps giving back no betraying footfalls.

He gained the bedside, then permitted just a single ray of light to fall across the man's face for a brief second of time.

Yet that was long enough for Nemesis to recognize in the man who was lying so completely at his mercy the chief of the terrible gang of blood-dyed villains that composed the Red Circle.

The knowledge caused the blood to run riot through his body, and his brain seemed on fire, and he whispered:

"Vengeance—vengeance!"

He raised the brightly gleaming blade.

"'Tis too easy a death for him."

And he allowed his hand to fall to his side.

What should he do?

Should he retreat now after having risked so much to gain an entrance to the place?

This hardly accorded with his feeling, and yet he felt that to kill this arch-fiend as he slept, was a death far too easy, too free from pain.

"No—no!" murmured Nemesis, "I'll spare him yet awhile. But it won't be for long. No, for the time is near at hand when by one fell swoop total destruction shall be upon them. Sleep on—sleep on! 'twill be your last!"

He turned to go, but halted, and faced the bed as the sleeper made an uneasy movement, and uttered a groan of horror.

The villain was just waking after his dream. Nemesis saw that he was waking, and like the lightning flash, the hand that clutched the gleaming steel was upraised, and hung quivering, uncertain whether to stab or not, above his heart.

But as he uttered the low cry and flung himself forward, Nemesis suddenly altered his mind, and ere he was reached, sunk quickly to the floor, and One went flying over his head, landing slightly stunned, and moaning, some feet away.

CHAPTER X.

ABDUCTED.

"GONE!"

This was poor Felix's last word ere his immortal soul fled from its earthly casket.

It was the first time that Amy had seen the breath of life depart, and even though she touched Felix, and he moved not, spoke to him and he answered not, she could not bring herself to fully realize the truth, until Mrs. Brophy entered, and finding her boy a corpse, set up a loud wailing that quickly drew others to the scene.

Then she knew that all was indeed over, and stealing to a corner where she was unobserved she gave vent to her feeling.

Two days later the funeral took place.

Sad-hearted and red-eyed Amy was one of the few that followed the remains of Felix to his last resting-place.

She saw the coffin lowered into the grave with a sinking heart, and as the first clods fell upon it she burst into tears.

In her life all had been distress, sorrow, pain, all except one ray of sunshine, and that was Felix.

When beaten by Mrs. Brophy—a not infrequent thing—when depressed, troubled, in Felix she found true sympathy and a good listener; oftentimes he could not fully comprehend the depth of her woes or their causes, yet ever was ready to return a full measure of compassion and sympathy; and when in company with the street gamins, who naturally became his playmates, he fell in with them and helped "snake" fruits and the like, he never forgot Amy; until one day she learned the source whence they came, when she talked to him and showed him how wrong his actions were, at which the little fellow clasped her impulsively around the neck, promised never to do so again, and kept his promise.

Thus were they bound together; is it to be wondered at that she felt badly?

They returned to the house, and there remained surrounded by sympathizing friends for several hours, when they were left alone.

It was then that Amy turned to Mrs. Brophy with the words:

"Mrs. Brophy, will you tell me now of my past life. You promised you would sometime."

The woman's heart was saddened and softened by her loss, and after a moment's hesitation, she replied:

"I will—leastwise all I know, which ain't much."

"Tell me what you know, please," said Amy.

Mrs. Brophy paused, even as her lips parted to commence Amy's story, for just then came to her mind something which Driscoll had once said to her.

"Don't ever tell the girl how she got into your keeping, and one of these days the holding of your tongue will pay you well, and then you can have whiskey in plenty."

Whiskey! Well did Driscoll understand the power it exercised over the woman.

Amy partially guessed the cause of Mrs. Brophy's stopping, and gifted with sudden shrewdness, she said, plaintively:

"Tell me for the sake of little Felix, dead and gone."

Felix! Ah! the girl had struck the proper chord. The heart that was being filled by thoughts of money and whiskey, was drawn again to her lost child, was saddened and softened once more.

"I will tell you all I know," said Mrs. Brophy, cutting short a choking sob. "We was jest married, me and Jack—God rest his soul!—and he was working along the docks stevedoring. One day he brought home with him a woman and a baby. You was the baby, the woman was yer mother, an' a leddy she was, every inch of her."

"Darlin'," he, 'I've brought home this poor creetur. She's got no friends, her money was robbed of her, an' she's sick an' ailin'. Will ye give her a bite an' a sup, an' a place by the stove a few days?"

"My Jack, God bless him, was a noble-hearted, gen'rous man, and many's the poor devil he's given his last penny to, and when I seen him standin' there and axin' me with his face aglow in goodness, I said:

"'Av coorse I will.' Then I said to the poor woman, who was pale and white almost as me own poor boy not long since, 'come an' welcome."

"Thank ye," sez she, and in she came.

"She said her name was Mrs. Hall, an' that yours was Hester, but afterwards she said as how we was to call you Amy."

"She was ailin', and I knew it, and she'd been with us only a week when she took to her bed. Jack got the doctor, who said she'd got—I forget the highfalutin thing he called it—and that she'd never get well."

"And she didn't; she just faded away an' died. About two hours before she drawed her last breath, she called me, and taking off two rings, she gave them to me, sayin':

"This is all I've got; take them, they will pay you for your trouble. Take care of Amy, and God will reward you! An' that was the last she ever said."

"We had her buried, me an' Jack."

"I kept the rings, both of 'em, until me poor Jack died, and times got hard; then I took them to the pawnbroker. An' that, Amy, is all I know."

"Did she not leave behind any clew to her identity, as to where she came from?"

"No; the only thing I found was a little black covered book with writin' in it, and a name printed in gold letters on the outside. I am no scholar myself, nor was Jack, but he spelled it out, d-i-a-r-y, diry, one night, I remember."

"What became of that book?"

"Tom Driscoll has it."

"How did he get it?"

"He seen me have it one night, an' tuk it from my hand, an' looked inside of it."

"Mrs. Brophy," says he, 'can I have this?"

"What for?" I axed.

"Nothin'," says he, 'but p'rhaps I may do the child yonder some good."

"So I let him take it, an' he has kept it ever since."

Amy would have questioned further, but just then the door opened, and who should walk in but Driscoll, who, having heard of Felix's death, had come to make one last try toward making Amy his wife, ere playing into the hands of Evens, as he had agreed to at the meeting in the detective's office the day before.

"Ha!" said Driscoll; "how are you, Mrs. Brophy? So your boy is dead?"

"Yes," she replied.

"Too bad—too bad! You're keeping up pretty well, though," an underhanded compliment of a nature much valued by such as Mrs. Brophy.

"Fairly, that's all," she returned.

"You had a wake?" he said, interrogatively.

"Not much of a wan," she said; "I was too poor."

"Too bad—too bad!" and then drawing a bottle of whiskey from his pocket, he said:

"Let's have a drink."

Pouring out two drinks, he raised his own, saying:

"May Felix's soul rest in peace."

Mrs. Brophy had turned away her head at sight of the rum, but its smell aroused all her latent love for liquor, and as he raised his glass, she seized that destined for her, and gulped down the fiery potion.

Driscoll smiled triumphantly, for he saw a possible victory looming up.

Amy groaned at the sight, for she knew how it would end.

Driscoll plied Mrs. Brophy with liquor until she was more than half drunk, and then he broached the subject of Amy's marriage to him.

"She shall marry you," said Mrs. Brophy, in a maudlin tone.

"But suppose she says she won't?"

"I'll make her," said Mrs. Brophy, with her brows knitting into a dark scowl.

"Right away?"

"Soon's you get a priest," was the reply.

"All right; I'll go for one now," said Driscoll, springing to his feet. "Keep her here till I come back."

"Faith, I will that," said the woman, as the scheming villain disappeared.

The time had come for Amy to act.

Stepping forward, she stopped for a minute beside the table, caught up the bottle of liquor that had made the woman a brute, and dashed it to pieces on the hearth; then coolly stepped toward the door.

"Where're goin'?" called out Mrs. Brophy.

"I'm going to leave you. Good-by!" and she placed her hand on the door-knob.

"Come back!" cried the half-drunken woman, in angry tones, springing forward to intercept Amy, who, however, proved too quick for her unsteady movements, and reaching the hall, she dashed down the stairs, and hastened into the street. For a moment she half halted, then sped away, and fifteen minutes later she knocked at the door of the woman she had befriended.

"Come in," said a voice, low, sweet and sad, in response to which Amy entered.

"I'm glad to see you," said Sarah Chase, recognizing Amy, and hurrying to meet the girl, she kissed her tenderly.

"Oh!" cried Amy, in breathless tones, "save me. Take care of me. I've come to live with you always. Will you take me and keep me?"

"Yes, poor child; but what is the matter? Why are you so greatly excited?"

In a few words, Amy explained her situation, which excited the sympathies of her hostess in her behalf, and uttering soothing words, she got the girl into a calmer state of mind.

"They can't find me here," said Amy, "and I'll be careful and not go out except after dark, and Tom Driscoll will be baulked."

Ah! she did not know that by a singular fatality, he even then knew her hiding place.

Night came; her hostess wanted some groceries. Amy went out for them, and her mission accom-

plished, was hurrying homeward, when, in a dark spot, a coat was thrown over her head, she was picked up and thrust into a closed carriage.

CHAPTER XI.

THE BLOODY RECORD.

WITH mind buffeted by fear, One had allowed his imagination, his superstition, a wide scope, and when he saw the dim figure by the bedside he took it for something more than human, and of this he was convinced when he passed in freedom across the spot where it had stood.

Nemesis waited a minute after sinking to the floor, and hearing naught but the groans of the terrified man, and as he stirred not, the avenger arose and glided silently across the floor, and entering the passage, retraced his steps to torture-room A. Hardly had he entered it when he heard a footstep in the hall, and a toga-wrapped figure entered. Both halted and gazed at each other.

Nemesis, at the time, was near the chair containing the corpse, and as the newcomer's eyes rested on the silent figure, a suspicion leaped to his mind that he was facing the author of all the late mysteries.

"Who are you?" he demanded.

"A friend," replied Nemesis. "You are number Four?"

"I am; and you?"

"Six."

An expression of doubt crossed Four's face, and it was with faltering steps that he crossed toward the chair to learn what had happened; Nemesis waited patiently, with one hand concealed behind him, clutching the hilt of his knife; the moment came to act, and springing forward he clutched Four's throat, and bore him to the floor; then with his knife-hand he seized his mask, and raised it, saying:

"I am the avenger! Do you know me?"

A groan, choked off short, was the reply.

"Ah, you do! Thank God, you know to whom to lay your death. Dog, die?"

With a grunt of satisfaction, Nemesis drove the blade into Four's body up to its hilt; a simple sigh, or groan, and another of the gang had met his just fate.

Raising, Nemesis was about to leave the place when a thought struck him; "it will not do to have him found in such a condition! I must put him in the tub."

He lifted the body and placed it in the tub, while bending over which he heard a footstep behind him; it gave him a sudden start, and he half raised his head to look at the person, then thought better of it, and remained as he was.

"What are you doing, Four?" was asked.

"Ha!" thought Nemesis, "it is some one who knew of Four's entrance here, and followed him; I must be wary;" then aloud, "just looking into this thing, and wondering whether I will be the next to fill it!"

"You are gloomy," was the rejoinder; "but what's the matter with Eleven?"

"Asleep," said Nemesis, adding under his breath—"in death!" Then aloud again; "I am gloomy, but how can I help it?"

"By bracing up like a man," was the reply, and Fourteen, for he it was, came forward and slapped Nemesis on the shoulder; quick as thought, the avenger wheeled around, his bloody blade whirled above his head, and then claimed Fourteen as its victim; a single wild wail, intense but low, fell from the stricken man's lips, as, living yet, he was hurled into the tub and the lid fastened down; in despair he attempted to arouse his sleeping companions, but the sounds were smothered, and ceased soon after Nemesis turned the crank.

It was dangerous to remain where he was; this Nemesis knew; yet also knew that his first care should be to conceal all traces of the two bodies, for the cause of their death known to the Red Circle, they would explore every

inch of their subterranean abode, and he would be unearthed.

With knife held ready for use, he waited, watched, listened.

The minutes fled; he opened the tub and gazed for an instant on its altered contents; waited until an hour had passed, then turned the crank again.

A little while, and he peered into the tub to find that his work was done!

Picking up the coil of wire he had left behind, he retreated from the room and gained his own within five minutes, having met with no further adventure.

He took the key he had made for the safe, and picking up the file commenced making the alterations necessary to make it fit; it took about half an hour to get it to his satisfaction, and he had just finished when a loud shout fell upon his ear coming from the room below.

In a second he was flat on his stomach on the floor, with his eye at the hole, and saw One raving and stamping violently; he had just entered the room, and discovered that Eleven was dead.

His shouts drew the others of the gang to the spot, or at least four of them, Two, Seven, Six and Thirteen.

One glanced at them, then thundered out:

"Where are Four and Fourteen?"

"In their room," someone answered.

"Call them out. You go, Six."

The person designated left the room, but quickly returned with the information that they were not there.

"Curses on them!" screamed One. "They must have left the place!"

"No," said Two, "I saw them go into their rooms myself."

"And they are not there now?"

"No," said Six.

"Go bring Fifteen here."

When the door-keeper entered, One angrily asked:

"Did any one leave this place last night?"

"No."

"You are positive?"

"I am."

"Then the curse of God is upon us," half wailed One. "See! He remained here on guard, and I find him dead. How did he die?"

They examined Eleven's body over and over, but no sign of violence could they find anywhere, a fact which caused the flesh of the six men to crawl with horror; their faces expressed the most intense fear; there was no use of longer attempting to conceal the fact that the breast of each and every one contained a seething hell of dread and terror.

"To the tub with the body!" cried One, and as it was being consumed he arose, and said: "I am afraid the time has come when we must part. There are six of us here, and Ned, the bar-tender, makes seven—the remnants of sixteen. What have you to say to a division of the spoils and a separation?"

As with one voice, the answer was:

"A separation—and immediately!"

"So be it," said One; "I agree to it. Boys, companions, faithful friends in the past, we have, I am sure, been followed of late by some agency or power that aims at our destruction. I cannot tell what it is; but even I, whom you have taken as a specimen of courage in by-gone days, even I fear it! We must part; I see no help for it. Let each man spend this day in settling his affairs around town. To-night we will meet at twelve, have a parting banquet and a drink in our dining-room, then we'll divide equally, and the rising of to-morrow's sun shall find us scattering to the four corners of the earth. Only one thing more do I wish, and that is the pleasure of destroying the man, demon or angel that has worked us harm!"

His toe touched the electrical machine as he took a forward step, and called his attention to it.

With a low curse, he seized the machine, and tore its covering to pieces; then examined its parts only to find them in perfect order.

"Ha-ha-ha!" laughed Nemesis; "I got ahead of you there!"

With a shudder One turned from the machine, and facing his men, said:

"I must go now, but will meet you in this room at midnight," and then left the room, being shortly after followed by the others.

Nemesis remained perfectly quiet for half an hour; then surveying the key he held in his hand, he muttered:

"Now to explore the contents of the safe!"

Again he assumed mask and toga, and descended to the lower rooms.

The halls had never before seemed so quiet and deserted, and he passed along without a sound falling on his ear to break the stillness.

Straight to the torture-chamber A he made his way, and crossing the room, he knelt before the safe.

Arranging the dark lantern in such a way as to make his work plain, he took out the key and inserted it.

For a moment he hesitated.

His hand trembled.

Had he gained his end?

He turned the key about half-way, then it stopped.

He had failed!

But not yet were his resources exhausted.

With an exclamation of sorrow, like a practical man he went to work; it took him perhaps about five minutes; then he tried the key again; half-way around it stopped again, but under the pressure of his thumb and forefinger it went further, and the bolt shot back; the safe was open.

The first thing he took out was the record of the Red Circle; his blood ran cold as he read the entries, the last one of which was:

"Rufus Rodney; spy; steam-room; tub."

Preceding that was another in this wise:

"Henry Barbour; electric chair; tub; killed too quick; made nothing but \$300 found on his person."

Then his gaze fell on another entry.

His face grew livid as he bent down more closely to the page; then with the short description seared on his brain, he clasped his forehead in his hands and cried:

"My God—my God! Can this be true? Hell-born imps, foul carrion, for this you shall suffer doubly; suffer for my wrongs and the wrongs of another!"

CHAPTER XII.

AMY'S CAPTIVITY.

A WORD as to how Driscoll so quickly discovered Amy's place of concealment.

After leaving Mrs. Brophy's, he hurried to the house of a priest living near by; found that gentleman at home, and persuaded him to go along back to perform a marriage ceremony.

On the way, Driscoll caught sight of Amy, and with not more than half an apology he suddenly darted away, leaving the surprised priest to gaze after him in open-mouthed wonder until he had disappeared from sight; and then he returned home, pondering inwardly over his visitor's strange behavior.

Driscoll followed Amy until he saw her disappear into the house where Sarah Chase lived.

One thing he now saw clearly: that all hopes of forcing Amy to marry him were useless; satisfied of this he then set about carrying into execution the plan formed by himself, Evens and Wilson, in the detective's office scarce twenty hours before.

The plan arranged was that when Driscoll delivered Amy at Wilson's house with proof, consisting of Mrs. Brophy's statement and the diary, he was to get one thousand dollars; the detective was to receive a compensation for

services as agreed upon privately by himself and Wilson.

This was the way affairs stood when Amy fled from Mrs. Brophy's.

After she had entered the house, Driscoll turned away, hurried to Mrs. Brophy's, and found her in a high state of excitement over Amy's disappearance, characterizing the same as a foul and ungrateful proceeding; Driscoll told her that he wished her to sign a statement that Amy was the child of the woman who had died in her house, which she professed herself as willing to do, and did as soon as it was written out.

Driscoll then hurried away, found a hackman whom he could depend on, and kept him in waiting near Amy's place of refuge.

We already know how she went out for groceries, and how on her way home she was seized and thrust into a carriage, and driven rapidly off.

Straight to the Fifth avenue mansion they went, and when they halted before Wilson's door, Driscoll gruffly said:

"Now, see here, gal, we want no fooling at all. You refused to marry me, and that's ended. The gentleman who lives here, Mr. Wilson, knows all about you and has promised to take care of you. Don't make any noise, or it'll be worse for you."

The carriage door opened, Amy stepped out, crossed the walk, and mounted the steps quietly, kept so partly by Driscoll's threat, partly by an intense desire, a fond hope, of solving the mystery of her past life.

Thomas, the waiter, opened the door.

He had received instructions, evidently, for at sight of the girl, he said:

"Come in," and when they had entered the hall, hurriedly shut the door, bade them step into the parlor, then went to Mr. Wilson's door and knocked.

"Well?" came the answer from within.

"The man and girl, sir."

"All right."

Thomas knew what that meant, and descended to the lower regions at once.

A few minutes later Arthur Wilson emerged from his room and entered the parlor, saying:

"I see you are here?"

"Yes."

"You have the statement?"

"Yes."

"And the diary?"

"I have."

"Let me have them!"

Driscoll stuck his tongue in his cheek significantly, then said:

"I'd like to see the color of your money first."

Wilson laughed contemptuously, and producing a roll of bills, selected one of the denomination of one thousand dollars; placing this on a table, and covering it with his hand, he remarked:

"You can see the color now. Just pass over the proofs, and the bill is yours."

The eyes of Driscoll glittered with avaricious fire, as he placed the book and papers in Wilson's hand, and eagerly clutched the bill.

"Now," said Wilson, "the exchange being made, our business is over."

"It is," said Driscoll.

"May I show you to the door, then?" asked Wilson, in cool and chilling tones.

Driscoll made no reply, and allowed himself to be shown into the street, after which Wilson returned, and looking long and searchingly at his visitor, remarked:

"I have nearly forgotten, but I believe your name is —" and he hesitated.

"Amy," she said, filling out the blank.

"Ah! yes, Amy; I remember now. Well, Amy, I have

an engagement to-night, and must leave you; but, first, let me show you to your room."

"Your name is Wilson, isn't it?"

"Yes."

"Then, Mr. Wilson, I was told that you knew something of my past life—could tell me who and what I am. Can't you spare just a little time, and tell me now?" she pleadingly added.

"No," he replied. "I am not certain yet as to your identity; I merely suspect that I know who you are. As soon as I can find time to examine this book, I can tell you all; not before. Now, come."

He led her to the third floor, and showed her into a finely furnished room looking out over the back of the "Web," into whose foul net had been drawn so many unsuspecting victims.

"This will be your room for the present," said Wilson. "I do not wish you to leave it on any account, and to secure this end, I shall lock the door behind me, making you nominally, a prisoner, though not in fact. There is a bell-rope communicating with down stairs; if you wish anything, ring for it. And now I must be off. Good-night."

"Good-night," was the rejoinder of the wondering girl, whose brain was puzzling over the queer situation she was in.

The poor girl was tired by the excitement of the last few days, as well as from her vigil beside the body of little Felix; and when her gaze fell on the bed, it looked so soft and inviting that she could not resist the temptation of burying herself in its snowy depths.

Meanwhile, Wilson had descended to his room, and had there taken a hasty glance over the contents of the diary.

What he saw satisfied him that Amy was the child of Harold Holbrook, and his face was light with grim exultation as he secured the valuable book.

After this he donned the mask and cloak, and paid a visit to the underground home of the Red Circle.

It was the night, when dazed, confounded by the mysterious deaths and disappearances of his men, he proposed a separation.

The next morning he met his men, as agreed, and then proposed a banquet at night, and a scattering to the four winds of the earth.

This sudden change of his intentions of several days before, complicated matters so far as Amy was concerned.

What to do with her, Wilson hardly knew; to him it seemed a shame to give her up, for she was a rich prize, and he could not bear to have her fall into other hands.

Thinking the matter over that last afternoon, he came to this conclusion:

"I'll marry her, run the risk of staying on this side of the Atlantic, take her to Chicago, and thence to New Orleans, secure the vast wealth from which she has been excluded, and then fly to some secluded spot in the Old World, and there spend what I have gained in living like a prince."

And Amy?

She passed the day quietly, without attempting to escape or thwart the will of her captor; he had in his possession a little black-covered diary, which she would have given worlds to possess.

He knew something of her past life; he had promised to make her acquainted with it, as soon as he satisfied himself that he was not mistaken; all these reasons caused her to accept her nominal captivity quietly and with good grace.

And Wilson, during the day, hurried hither and thither, closing up various business transactions in different parts of the city, and when at dusk he mounted the steps of the Fifth avenue mansion it was with a feeling of relief.

He entered his own room, had his supper brought up, which he then coolly ate, after which he again donned mask and cloak.

Proceeding to the fireplace, he opened the secret door, ere passing through which, to attend the banquet and the scene of the Red Circle's dissolution, he remarked:

"Ay, the end has nearly come! To-morrow I'll marry Amy, and to-morrow night we'll be on our way to Chicago; and now, for the last time, to see the boys," and he passed through the secret door.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE RED CIRCLE'S BOOK.

TOWERING grandly up in indignation, and clutching the book wherein he had read the foul doings of the Red Circle, Nemesis ejaculated:

"By the gods, but you shall suffer—suffer for my wrongs and the wrongs of another."

He glanced at the book; at the sentence which had wrought up his excitement, and read it over again.

"Eugene Ransom—iron skull—cash—confession as follows:"

"Good God!" cried Nemesis, "I never suspected this, even at the worst. Confession? What confession could he make?"

He read slowly on, and his face, at first expressing indignation, now began to express incredulity, and then sorrow.

He finished, then groaned:

"Can it be possible! Eugene Ransom a thief, a robber of the widow and the orphan, a dastardly criminal. God forgive him!"

He read no further, but closed the book, returned it to the safe, and returned to his own room.

And what was this confession that caused him so much sorrow?

We will suppose ourselves in possession of the book quoting as follows:

"Harold Holbrook and myself (Eugene Ransom) were partners in business, of which he owned the largest interest, though for various reasons it was generally given out that I had held the greater interest of the two.

"That was in 1850; in 1851 Holbrook became involved in some financial difficulties of his own, and to save his property transferred it to me—that is, put it in my name; a short time before this he married a poor orphan girl, who, a year later, presented him with a daughter; in 1852, while still trying to settle his monetary difficulties, he one day got into an angry dispute with one of his creditors, and the upshot of the affair was that Holbrook was called a 'cheat,' and the creditor a 'd—d liar.' Insults such as these require blood in southern countries, and in less than two hours the preliminaries of a meeting had been arranged. Ere going to the field of battle, Holbrook had made a will, which he handed me, saying: 'If I fall, dispose of my property as this requests. Will you, my dear Ransom?' 'Yes,' I answered.

"And take care of my wife and child?" he said. "I will," I answered.

"The two men met. Holbrook fell at the first fire, stone dead.

"I went back to the city, and in my office opened the will. Holbrook was worth over a hundred thousand dollars, all of which, except ten thousand dollars, and an annuity of five hundred dollars a year to a dead sister's orphaned child, was bequeathed to his wife and her heir or heirs.

"Holbrook's household consisted of his wife, their child, now about four months old; Sarah Chase, a friend of Mrs. Holbrook, who had charge of her child as well as of Holbrook's orphaned niece, about the same age as little Amy. At the time I was a widower with an only son, Rodney, then two years old.

"I had been given to gambling and fast living, and at the time was so low that to have given up what I held of Holbrook's would have ruined me. This was the entering

wedge, and ere long I had determined to retrieve my fortune at the expense of my dead friend's, by marrying his widow. Several months passed, and one day I missed the will. Fearful that it might turn up unexpectedly against me, I hurried to Mrs. Holbrook and proposed to her, receiving a flat rejection.

"With the will gone I was not safe, and once in the race I determined to stop at nothing. I had obtained a mastery over Sarah Chase, and one day I gave her some powders to administer to the friend who had taken her in and cared for her. These powders contained poison. They were not intended to kill quickly, but their action was slow and sure. For a week Sarah Chase administered the powders, then disappeared, taking with her Holbrook's niece.

"A month passed. I pressed Mrs. Holbrook hard, she began to fear me and demanded her husband's money; I told her she was a beggar, and showed her that everything was in my name; I pressed her hard again, and she promised an answer in two days; when I went for it I found the house empty and deserted, for she had fled also.

"I verified my right to Holbrook's property little by little, sold some improved parts of it and made more money; finally I established myself in business in Chicago and there have lived ever since; once I heard from Mrs. Holbrook through an Irishman named Brophy who had worked for me in New Orleans; I met him here in New York by chance, and in conversation he incidently informed me of the presence at his house of a woman and a child; in the description of the former I recognized Mrs. Holbrook, and satisfied myself of it by a glance at her as she lay on her sick bed.

"The will about which I had given myself so much uneasiness I afterward found in my safe precisely where I had placed it, and forgotten the fact.

"And this Amy, Mrs. Holbrook's child, is the true heir of all I possess, and this statement is actual truth, so help me God."

This, in a condensed form, is the confession made by Eugene Ransom under a promise of life, which was foully broken within an hour after it was made.

And Nemesis? After reaching his room, he mounted a chair beneath the half-finished excavation made before, and like a hungry tiger seeking for buried prey, he tore away the earth, until he emerged above ground inside of an outhouse in the next yard, and connected with an oyster saloon; pulling his hat down over his eyes, he passed through the place unnoticed, and visited a drug-store, obtained a package of something white and powdery, returned by the same way to his room, and there donned the mask and cloak; stealing down stairs into the storeroom he pulled the vent plugs from several small casks of brandy, liquor and wines, poured in the white powder and retreated, muttering:

"Now comes the banquet of death!"

CHAPTER XIV.

THE BANQUET OF DEATH.

The hour of meeting appointed was at hand.

All that remained of the red-handed, blood-loving gang, were gathered in torture room A: the Grand Chief was in the chair, and as the hour came precisely, arose and said:

"What shall we do first? Shall we have the banquet or division of money first?"

"The feast!" cried one. "I'm thirsty and hungry. I've had so many things to look after that I haven't even had time to wet my whistle."

Others took up the cry, and One remarked:

"So be it. We'll away to the feast."

For an hour or more several of the members had been busily preparing it, and when they entered the dining-room all was in readiness; a near-by restaurant had sent the viands into the Cobweb before sunset, and they had been conveyed from there to the dining-room; on a side-

board stood various small casks of liquors and wines, and on the table were decanters rosy with each variety.

In his own room Nemesis watched the last gathering of the vile crew; a look, a smile of exultation overspread his face; he heard the few words that were spoken with a glance of satisfaction.

When they arose and left the room he leaped to his feet, and extending one arm heavenward, he exclaimed:

"Thank God! the hour of my vengeance is at hand."

He caught up the mask he had so often worn, and once more adjusted it to its place.

The toga he let lie where it was.

Unlocking his door he passed through Celeste's room, and in the large room beyond found the crazy girl herself.

His excitement of manner did not escape the argus eyes of love, and reading in his face a feeling inexplicable to her, Celeste forgot her shyness, and springing forward, cried:

"Where are you going? What is the meaning of that knife in your hand?"

For one moment Nemesis gazed half fondly at her, then his relaxed features grew stern again, and he cried:

"I go to wreak vengeance on the heads of those who have wronged me and mine," and without another word he rushed away.

He gained the door of the banquet hall; it was partially ajar, and through the crack he saw the decanters pass around, each man selecting what he liked best; and Nemesis' heart was gladdened by the sight he saw as each man raised his well-filled glass in response to One's toast.

"Death to our enemies, and for ourselves a short life, but a merry one."

"Ay, short it will be," muttered Nemesis to himself, as glasses met lips.

Each man in the party, except One, drained his glass to the last drops; he who made the exception sat down his glass, and remarked:

"This brandy has a queer flavor! Fill up again, boys! I'll take a glass of port wine this time! Fill up; now—down with it!"

With a murmur of approval, the glasses were again drained, and this time more than one made the same remark, which we previously credited to One; then for a few minutes came tastings and sipping, and comparings of this and that; foremost among the samplers was Dandy Ned, who finally began to grow deathly pale.

"What's the matter?" asked One, springing to his feet, and hastening to the bartender's side.

"I don't know. Water, quick! I'm burning inside, being gnawed and eaten up. Quick! Water, for God's sake."

A glass of water was placed to his lips, but the first swallow came gurgling back from his throat, accompanied by a peculiar white froth.

A wild howl broke the stillness that reigned, as they all watched Ned, speculating on whether or not he was suffering with a fit.

It came from the bartender, who struggled hard to break from those who quickly seized him; the froth came in greater quantities, he began to choke and gasp, and as a fearful tremor convulsed his frame, there came the words, rendered indistinct by the froth:

"I'm poisoned, I'm dying!"

As these fearful words rang out, each man looked at his neighbor, and found that he was clasping his hands across his stomach, and each saw reflected in the others, his own pale, frightened face.

Like an electric chorus was the fearful news, and a wild wail went up in chorus from the doomed men.

They gazed blankly at each other for a minute, then each one shrank away with the pain and burning growing more intense at each second of time fled by; first one and

another succumbed to the terrible dose, and sank gasping, groaning, frothing, to the floor.

Rapid was the poison's effect, and soon Ned was writhing in the throes of dissolution; his lower jaw fell, and at each labored, jerked-out breath, the foam was sent flying in every direction; his eyes started from his head, and became fixed in wildest horror; lying on his back he projected his back upward until head and heels met, then losing his balance, he fell flat, wriggled a few feet like a snake, and seizing a leg of the table in his dying clutch, spasmodically drew himself forward, wound his body snake-like around it, and all was over.

His glassy eyes, death-set, were glaring on another poor devil who was groveling around the floor, battling with death, but oh! how feebly; the poison insidiously spreading through every tiny vein and artery carried the fires of hell there, and soon he, too, was gasping, frothing, writhing, wriggling, *dying*.

A companion fell across him just before life was extinct, and with a hyena-like howl, the dying man fixed his froth-flecked teeth deep into the other's arm.

With terrible glee depicted on his face, Nemesis watched the scene, and a smile illumined his features as each man fell.

One by one the poison claimed them as its own until all had fallen but the Grand Chief.

He had drank less than any of the others, and consequently was not so soon affected, and yet in the fearful, horrible scene before him he saw an outline of his own fate, for he could not help but feel the liquid fire that was dancing in his blood. So far he had spoken no word, only held himself upright beside the table and gazed about him in despair, while his own face was growing pale and deathly; he felt a weakening of his limbs, a sinking of the stomach, a tremor of the frame, a twitching of the muscles, and knew what all portended.

He heard a step, firm and solid, and turning toward the door, saw enter there, an erect, upright form.

"Who are you?" he hoarsely asked.

"*I am the Nemesis of the Red Circle!* Ha—ha, devil, I am avenged!" cried the avenger. "You owe every death to me! One by one I have killed you off until *all* have become my victims."

A gleam of rage shot athwart One's face, and darting his hand to his belt, he shrieked:

"D—n you, your triumph shall be short-lived!"

Then a look of anguish crossed his face, for his revolver was missing, he had forgotten it; however, a heavy knife lay on the table beside him, and seizing this he sprang toward Nemesis, screaming:

"I'll fix you—I'll fix you, bloodhound!"

But Nemesis was ready for him, and parried the vicious lunge; an instant later, clutched in each other's embrace, they were battling wildly, the one for life the other for death.

A shout of demoniac glee; One had driven the point of his blade in the shoulder of Nemesis; on—on, they fought, thrusting, parrying, biting, kicking, on—on, fearful to behold.

A cry of pain, One's shoulder was penetrated; on—on, bright, flashing blades circling through.

A horrified shriek, Celeste stood at the door, her eyes fixed in horror on the combat.

A cry of fiendish joy!

Nemesis was carried to the floor, and quick as a panther One was upon him, and had his hand at his throat, his knife upraised; in an instant—a second, and all would have been over.

Love seized the opportunity, and nerved by the appalling danger of the object she loved, Celeste sprang forward, seized the upraised arm, and granted with supreme strength for the minute, dragged off the exulting monster.

With fearful curses on his lips, One seized the girl, and sent her spinning away, until, falling, her temple struck

against the corner of the table, and she stretched herself on the floor in a senseless condition.

One turned to seize his antagonist ere he arose, but Nemesis had not failed to take the advantage of the opportunity afforded him, and as the enraged chief of the Circle came forward, met him with a deadly thrust of his sharp-pointed blade.

It decided the battle, and One, tottering back, fell into a chair, and resting one elbow on the table, clutched the chair back with both hands.

And thus he sat, while the blood flowed in a crimson stream, and the froth began flecking his mouth.

Nemesis had stepped hastily to Celeste's side, and found that she breathed faintly yet audibly, so turned his attention to the dying chieftain, whose looks of rage had melted into agony and fear.

"Who are you?" he gasped.

"Behold!" and Nemesis flung aside the mask.

"Rufus Rodney!"

"So you know me, but others know me as Rodney Ransom, the son and avenger of your victim, Eugene Ransom, my father—may God have mercy on his soul!"

"You saved my life once——"

"And now I claim my debt!" cried Rodney. "You are dying; further concealment is useless; tell me how you came in possession of this girl?"

"I will," gasped One, each word brought out with difficulty. "A few years ago—I was crossing—Broadway. A girl—was crossing in—the opposite direction—she was suddenly—knocked down—by a carriage—partly because—I ran against her. Her face—attracted me—she was senseless—I had her—brought to—my house—when she recovered—reason was gone. I then brought—her to—this place—and soon—taught her to—entice men from—the saloon—to the interior—I used her—for this purpose—she not knowing—the share she—took in our—desperate work. You love her—I see it—in your looks. She has—harbored you somehow—curses on her—well—murderess—insane—with my—dying—curse," and here he paused, unable to go further.

His limbs began to work convulsively, the froth on his lips became dyed with crimson from an internal bleeding; he fell from his chair, kicked, groaned, uttered one despairing wail, and had expiated his life of crime in a terrible death.

The first thing to be done was to take Celeste from the terrible place; this was accomplished by carrying her through the secret passage to Wilson's room in the Fifth avenue mansion.

Rodney remained by her side until she awoke from her sleep of insensibility, and a minute later passed into another demanded by nature.

Then he returned to the underground rooms, opened the safe, and transported everything of value to the same room where Celeste was sleeping, after which he returned again, and on searching One, or Wilson, found on him, among other things, the little black-covered diary.

With these he returned to the room formerly occupied by Wilson, and quietly awaited Celeste's awaking.

CHAPTER XV.

CONCLUSION.

It was the day after the night when the Red Circle met a just fate.

Rodney had found Amy in the upper room the next morning, and listened to her story, and found it corroborated by the diary.

Pressing his hand to his forehead, he cried:

"I understand it all; you are the child my father robbed. You are rich, for I shall restore all to you, and I am a beggar!"

"No—no!" said Amy, and there stopped.

"But what is this?" he said, a minute or two later, as

thumbing the diary, he found two leaves pasted together. Carefully he went to work, and in a short while had it apart.

A paper fell out.

He picked it up, and read:

"CARRIE, MY FRIEND:—Forgive me for the duplicity, for I have stolen your child, and left behind that of your husband's sister. I changed them long ago, for your child seemed to love me as its mother. I can tell you no more: forgive—forgive—forgive—

"SARAH."

The paper was blotted by tears, and crushed and crumpled.

And written on the sealed pages was:

"My God! how can I bear it? Husband gone—child stolen—persecuted myself! I must flee this spot—for what, God only knows!"

That was all; Eugene Ransom's confession told the rest.

Amy and Rodney went down stairs, and found Celeste sitting up in bed, staring about her in a puzzled way.

Rodney glanced at her face—her eyes—and found them beaming with intelligence.

The sequel is soon told;

A fall had deranged her intellect, and, as is not unfrequently the case, another had restored her to reason.

She remembered going across Broadway—of being struck and knocked down; then came one long blank to the time when she woke up, just before Rodney and Amy entered.

She seemed to have a faint recollection of his face, however; but through all her life it never came clear, and he never told her of the part she took in the murders committed by the Red Circle.

In his perplexity of mind, he read over the letter again and again, and finally, without being aware of it, did so aloud.

At the sound of the name of Sarah Chase, both girls started in surprise, and each told of their connection with her.

A carriage was obtained, and they drove to Sarah Chase's humble home, and found her there.

She greeted Amy as one arisen from the dead; and when her joy had somewhat subsided, made clear the mystery in a few words.

Living at the house when both of the girls were born, she conceived a strange liking for Amy Holbrook.

Celeste Rockwood, the other child, was parentless, and in a moment of craziness, she determined to make for each child a mother, by becoming such to Amy, and palming off the other.

The babes were so young, and Mrs. Holbrook having had no care of her own child, this was easily done.

Persecuted by Ransom, she had fled to New York, and there supported herself and the child she so idolatrously loved.

One day Celeste—or, properly, Amy—had gone out, and she had never seen her again until that day.

"Then you are the heiress," he said to Celeste, "and you, Amy, are her cousin, and entitled to ten thousand dollars, and five hundred dollars yearly; I shall see to it that everything is straightened out."

A month rolled by, and Celeste and Amy both had their rights, while Rodney was nearly a beggar.

He saw them comfortably settled, and then busied himself with the affairs of the Red Circle.

In the book was a list of the victims, and the amounts taken from them; from the almost fabulous sum found in the safe he returned to the heirs of each victim a proportionate amount, doing it secretly, of course.

This done, he paid one more visit to the underground rooms, and at every available point in the partition placed light charges of powder; these he afterward exploded simultaneously by electrical aids, thus shattering all the partitions and supports to the thick walls of earth above.

In this condition it remained until two years later a light shocking earthquake passed through New York, demolishing windows and fragile things very plentifully; this shock was the straw that broke the camel's back, and the whole thing caved in, leaving a big hollow behind, which the now proprietor of the building filled in; the papers talked of the earthquake, told of a remarkable sinking between the buildings facing Broadway on Fifth avenue, but never once dreamed of the horrible secret it concealed. And one word of explanation as to Rodney's escape from the steam room.

It will be remembered that ere he was conveyed to it, Celeste saw him struggling in the grasp of his captors, and threatened them should they do him harm; she left, but keeping watch saw Rodney thrown into the room; an opportunity came when the sentinel's back was turned, and opening the door she released Rodney and placed a knife in his hand; he understood the situation in an instant, and crawling up behind Sixteen, knifed him; to change his own clothing to the body of the dead man was but the work of a few minutes, and then he was thrown into the room, and Rodney retreated with Celeste up stairs; desiring to see if her ruse had succeeded, she showed Rodney the spy hole of which he afterwards made such good use; as will be remembered, the body from the steam room was so badly disfigured as to be unrecognizable, a fact which concealed the game that had been put up on them.

One scene more, and we are done.

Celeste, no longer with brain diseased, but bright, intelligent, knowing full well what she was about, fell in love with Rodney over again.

The courtship was much the same as they are ordinarily described, and one night Rodney plucked up the courage to put the question:

"Will you be mine?"

The answer was not delayed, there was no affectation in either voice or manner, as she comprehended what he had asked; it was given plainly, truthfully, as every honest woman should meet such a question; and the answer was:

"Yes."

Not long afterward there was a wedding, and to-day they are living happily together; she joyful ever and smiling; he joyful too, but with a little sadness in voice and manner, caused by the frightful scenes he had witnessed, the knowledge of his father's terrible death, and the consciousness that in his bosom he retained the key to a horrible mystery which he can never disclose.

Let us hope that time will wear away this sadness, and make him forever as happy as when we saw him last, bending over a cradle, gazing into a pair of sleepy, big, blue eyes, exulting in the joy of being a father.

And so we close.

[THE END.]

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